

Volume No. 2

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY IN A MULTIFAMILY BRAND

PART ONE

*How to Level Up a Multifamily Brand
through Placemaking*



AT ONE TIME, BRANDING AND MARKETING APARTMENT COMMUNITIES STARTED WITH A LOGO AND ENDED WITH A FLOORPLAN BROCHURE. IN TODAY'S DYNAMIC SOCIETY, MULTIFAMILY COMPANIES UNDERSTAND THE NEED TO CONNECT WITH THEIR RESIDENTS ON A MUCH DEEPER LEVEL.

Each signed lease represents more than a monthly rent payment. When developers and property managers work to deliver a memorable experience, those individual leases turn into long-term residents with a rooted connection to their apartment community. That brand loyalty ripples out to the friends and family of each happy renter and allows a multifamily brand to expand its reach.



I long, as does every human being, to be at home wherever I find myself.

Maya Angelou



**PLACEMAKING:
CONNECTING
EXPERIENCES WITH
COMMUNITY**





In the past, home served as the only respite from work and other daily routines. A person's living room, balcony or backyard filled the need for quiet, relaxation and time to connect with family and friends. While home remains vitally important, people now seek out more from their neighborhoods and communities in terms of belonging.

To meet that deeper need, commercial real estate players, including multifamily properties, retailers and office developers, have a unique opportunity to collaborate and create places where people want to build community.

Heather Personne, a member of the Urban Land Institute Placemaking Council describes it this way:

Across the real estate industry, there is greater interest in creating projects that are less focused on a specific asset class—multifamily housing, retail, or office—and more focused on creating a place where people want to convene. It's about creating that third place that's not necessarily where you live or work, but where people come together. Much of this change has been instigated by the millennials, who want to work and live differently, who are interested in the sharing economy. Even baby boomers are transitioning to living in more urban environments.

Of note, this "urban" lifestyle of live-work-play applies to many suburban locations as well. In fact, suburbs have shown some of the most vibrant growth in multifamily rentership across the country. Many young families want that convenient and close lifestyle paired with the more open landscapes, schools, parks and other amenities suburbs offer.

HOW PEOPLE SUPPORT YOUR BRAND

THE SENSE OF BELONGING AND BUY-IN APARTMENT RESIDENTS FEEL AS A RESULT OF THOUGHTFUL PLACEMAKING IS RETENTION GOLD. WHEN PLACEMAKING WORKS, PEOPLE NO LONGER FEEL SEPARATE FROM THEIR COMMUNITY, BUT FEEL A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP IN IT. THEY HAVE A STAKE IN ENSURING ITS FUTURE HEALTH AND PURPOSE IN THE AREA.

According to Joseph Batdorf, president of J Turner research, branding holds value for multifamily companies because it results in brand loyalty among existing residents. He said:

Brand primarily becomes an influential factor during the renewal process. Satisfied residents are more likely to renew an existing lease, or start a new lease at a different community within the portfolio when their living experience meets or exceeds expectations.

In addition, the Urban Land Institute reports that placemaking strategy can help multifamily developers attain lower development costs, higher project value and "enhanced branding and market recognition."

Placemaking can set the tone for your company's or property's branding efforts. If you view your property in the broader context of its neighborhood, city, state or region, you will begin to tap into the essence of what that place means to the people who live there.

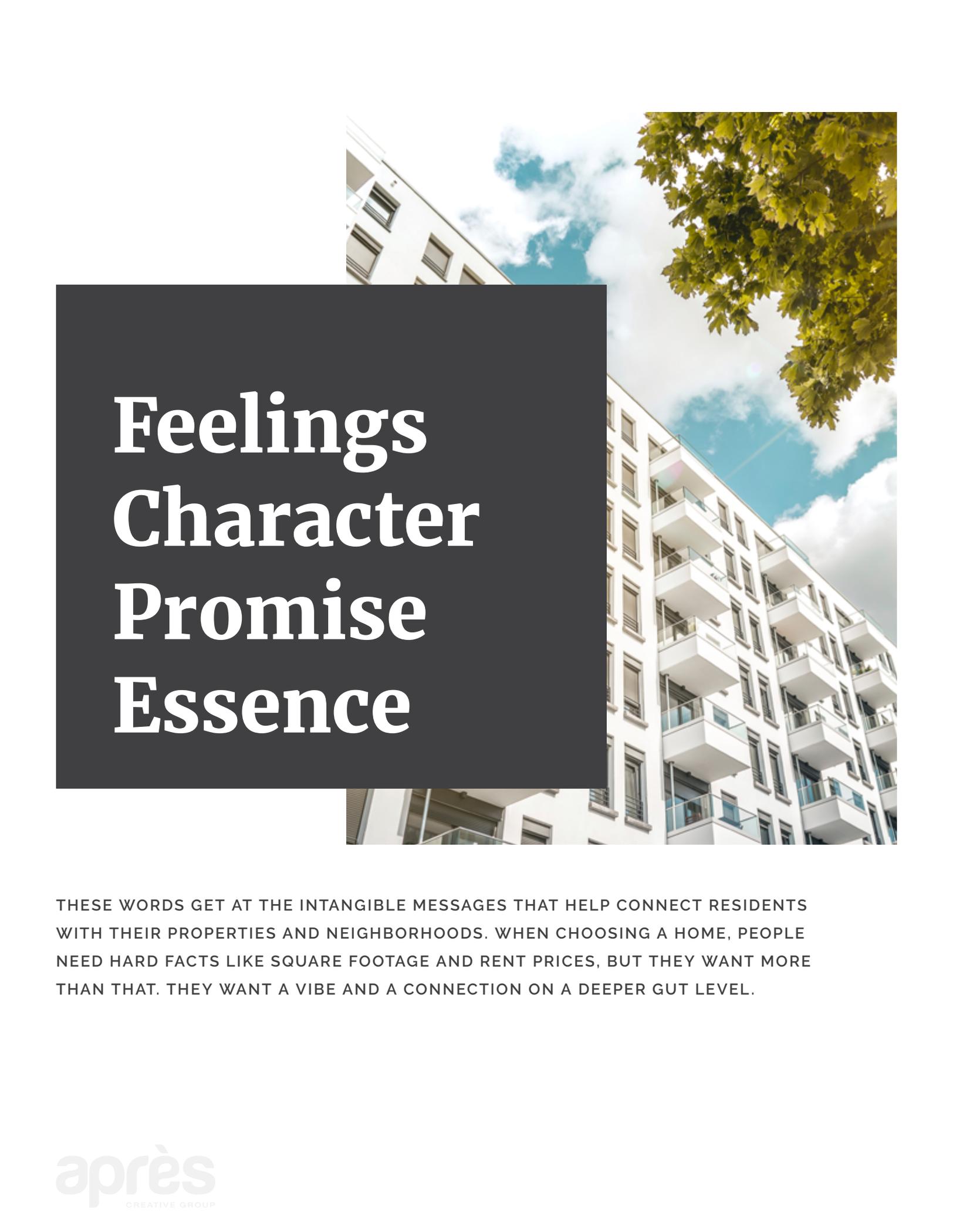
Bill Baker, who wrote a guide for cities and towns on what he calls "place branding," reflects that:

A place brand is the totality of thoughts, feelings and expectations that people hold about a location. It's the character, reputation and the enduring essence of the place and represents its distinctive promise of value and sense of place. Most importantly, it's a valued promise that must be grounded in truth and reality.



**Most importantly,
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Bill Baker



Feelings Character Promise Essence

THESE WORDS GET AT THE INTANGIBLE MESSAGES THAT HELP CONNECT RESIDENTS WITH THEIR PROPERTIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS. WHEN CHOOSING A HOME, PEOPLE NEED HARD FACTS LIKE SQUARE FOOTAGE AND RENT PRICES, BUT THEY WANT MORE THAN THAT. THEY WANT A VIBE AND A CONNECTION ON A DEEPER GUT LEVEL.

WITH THAT IN MIND, CONSIDER YOUR PROPERTY'S BRANDING AND ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

WHAT FEELINGS OR EMOTIONS DOES OUR BRAND EVOKE?

DOES OUR BRAND COMMUNICATE OUR VALUES OR VISION?

DO OUR MESSAGES FOCUS ON BASIC FACTS, OR DO THEY GO DEEPER TO REFLECT WHAT MATTERS MOST IN A PERSON'S LIFE?

WOULD OUR BRANDING START CONVERSATIONS, OR IS IT FORGETTABLE?

IS THERE AN ELEMENT OF STORYTELLING THAT DRAWS PEOPLE INTO THE MESSAGE AND PLACE?

DOES THE BRAND EMBODY THE SURROUNDING AREA'S DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES AND ASSETS?

Branding goes much deeper than a sales pitch. It's about much more than listing features; branding must make meaningful connections in the minds of readers and viewers. A successful brand will allow your customer to imagine herself in the place and how it would enhance her life to live, work and play in your community.

A close-up photograph of a man with a beard and glasses, smiling broadly while holding a glass of water. In the background, a woman is also smiling, creating a warm and social atmosphere. The lighting is soft and golden, suggesting an indoor setting like a bar or restaurant.

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**UNDERSTANDING
WHY AND HOW
PEOPLE GATHER**



Millennials and GenZers have moved away from a purely consumer focus when they seek places to hang out. While teens and young adults might have been the Mall Rats of the 80s and 90s, today's younger generations want to spend time in places without a sole focus on buying.

Artisan food halls and pop-up art installations have taken the place of strip malls and movie theaters in many locales. Denver's [Selfie Museum](#), "Colorado's First Instagram Art Pop-up," and [Meow Wolf](#) are great examples of this new idea of place and community centered on pop art and social sharing.

Placemaking Council member, Philip Palmgren, sums up:

Successful placemaking means offering people a place to exchange ideas and perhaps goods and services. The millennial generation continues to demand more with regard to a space. They want to just hang out without expectations that they're necessarily going to buy something. They want a place of respite. So a place has to balance transaction and reflection. When you do that, the development community benefits because the value of their real estate goes up, and the community benefits because they're able to have a space that they feel like they are welcome in.

Architect Deb Ryan describes this generational need as one that emphasizes activity over aesthetics, saying "It's about placemaking. Public spaces can't just be pretty spaces, they have to be activated."



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**DESIGNING PLACE:
CREATING A SENSE
OF HOME**

Multifamily developers in all markets can assess community needs when breaking ground on a new development. Seeking input from community stakeholders will help you focus on the unmet placemaking needs of the immediate neighborhood.

For existing properties, redesign and redevelopment can open the door to new amenity concepts that foster a sense of community-building, both with your residents and the neighborhood at large. Your property can serve as a hub or sponsor for community events, if you don't have the space to add dedicated gathering places.

When the average person hears the words architecture and design, it likely brings to mind iconic structures like the [Guggenheim Museum](#) in New York or Colorado's famed [Spaceship House](#). However, design also informs every aspect of everyday buildings, both exterior and interior, and a thoughtful design helps create a sense of place for the people who use it.

VolumeOne.org lays out the "11 Principles of Placemaking" [in this piece](#). Item No. 2 speaks to design:

You are creating a place, not a design. The blueprints for a neighborhood improvement effort are much less critical to its success than other factors, such as a management plan and the involvement of local citizens.

That list goes on to remind city planners, architects and designers to observe the community in action, seek feedback from the people who will actually use the place and to create a form that supports the intended function of a building or area.

When these principles align, the design moves from impersonal blueprints to living, breathing spaces where life and connection happen.

Australian Architect John Flynn expands on that idea [in this interview](#), saying:

The location is really what drives the place. You can't just go and create a fake place – a Disneyland somewhere... It's really getting the ideas from the developer, the site and then the community... and how we can add value to that. Everyone wants to live somewhere great.

In the multifamily industry, we know that each renter wants to get the most for their money, and it's not just about luxurious amenities or high-end finishes. It's that something extra. The vibe you get when you first walk into a place and it seems to draw you in. A well-informed design that takes into account the needs of residents and the community can elevate an apartment from space to place.



CRAFTING A SOUGHT-AFTER RENTER LIFESTYLE

32%

ACCORDING TO [PEW RESEARCH](#), **32 PERCENT OF RENTERS CONSCIOUSLY CHOOSE TO RENT, EVEN IF THEY COULD AFFORD TO BUY A HOME.**

Transient careers and a need for flexibility often top the priority list for renters by choice. Many people also love the work-play-live lifestyle of a mixed-use community, and not needing to worry about maintenance issues also carries a lot of weight.

Fast forward to 2021, where remote work has become the norm for many professionals, and that flexible and fun lifestyle begins to look even more attractive. When they can choose where they want to live and the carefree lifestyle they want to lead, more people could choose renting vs. buying.



Now that some renters need to worry less about proximity to work or transit, lifestyle offerings will become even more important. Regardless of whether renters by choice need access to employment-centered locations, they definitely will seek amenities that support their preferred way of life.

As you consider lifestyle elements and the sense of community that today's renters demand, think about:

HOW TO MAKE RESIDENTS' LIVES MORE COMFORTABLE, CONVENIENT AND ENJOYABLE

WAYS TO INCORPORATE SOCIAL INTERACTION INTO UNITS AND COMMON SPACES

PETS AS PART OF PEOPLE'S TOP PRIORITIES

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CITIZENSHIP WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD OR CITY

GREEN ELEMENTS THAT MEET RESIDENTS' NEED FOR OUTDOOR SPACE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS VALUES

TRUE WORK-LIVE-PLAY FUNCTIONALITY AND DESIGN, ESPECIALLY AS MORE PEOPLE WORK FROM HOME

UNCONVENTIONAL SERVICES OR AMENITIES THAT MEET DEMOGRAPHIC-SPECIFIC NEEDS

BRANDING THAT TELLS A COMMUNITY STORY

MARKETING THAT MOVES PROSPECTIVE RESIDENTS ALONG THEIR RENTER JOURNEY

RESIDENT COMMUNICATION AND SERVICE PROGRAMS THAT ENHANCE RETENTION

COMMUNITY-BUILDING EVENTS – BOTH ON-SITE AND IN THE LARGER COMMUNITY

Taking a more holistic view of what drives renters' practical and emotional needs will help your property deliver more than just a space to live. It will deliver an experience and foster loyalty among residents, which in turn will support your company's return on investment.



WORKING WITH COMMUNITY-BUILDING PROS

OUR CREATIVE TEAM DRAWS ON YEARS OF MULTIFAMILY EXPERIENCE,
COMBINED WITH GRAPHIC AND STORYTELLING TALENT TO
SUPPORT YOUR BRANDING AND MARKETING EFFORTS.

When we work with savvy developers and planners who fully grasp the power of placemaking, magic happens. With our graphic design and marketing, we communicate their physical design as much more than a series of glass, steel and brick. The outer aesthetics of a building matter a lot, but residents also must grasp how that building can become a place of meaning; how it can be home.

We invite you to take a look at some of our [work](#). We have helped these brands further their community-building and renter attraction efforts. Each one of these brand stories is unique, and each one highlights the importance of understanding your ideal resident at a human level.

If you would like to learn more about our approach and collaborative process, [reach out to us](#).



In this e-book, we have scratched the surface of the strategies Après Creative has honed through years of working with multifamily brands across the country. We encourage you to implement one or two new marketing ideas in the next few months. If you would like to take your multifamily marketing and branding to the next level, reach out to us for a free consultation.

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