

What is Smart City branding? 4 successful examples

— by Cristina Garrido, Sergio García i Rodríguez & Valeria Andrade

We live in a world saturated with information—surrounded by data, visual inputs, reports, products, and reviews that constantly deliver the latest news and trends. Despite this overwhelming flow, **when we need something specific, a range of options comes to mind in the form of concrete alternatives.** These choices aren't random—they're shaped by **emotional connections, past experiences, and a sense of familiarity** that helps us navigate through endless possibilities. This ability to cut through the noise and connect with something meaningful is the **true power of branding.**

Companies use branding as a powerful tool to communicate their **vision and values, translating abstract concepts into emotional connections.** The same applies to cities. **While cities are not consumer goods, they have come to realize the importance of branding to position themselves on a competitive global stage.** Monuments, cuisine, and lifestyle may influence our choice for a vacation destination. However, when deciding where to invest, relocate a headquarters, or establish a new home, other critical factors come into play—such as a forward-thinking strategy, sustainable development and economic competitiveness.

Beyond setting long-term goals, **cities must craft a branding strategy that reflects their unique identity.** This is what builds **reputation, drives positioning** and distinguishes one city from another.

Smart City Branding: a key for global positioning

For those cities that have gotten into the Smart Cities movement, **branding has become an important ally too.** In the last few years, so many cities around the world are claiming themselves as “Smart Cities”, and a very competitive market has been established. In this context, **how can we distinguish Smart Cities from one another?** How can these Smart Cities stand out and make a difference?

As curators of the Smart City Expo World Congress, we see this challenge every year. **Many global capitals around the world are competing between them** in the event with one only objective: standing out. However, it is challenging for them to achieve this in the expected way. That is why **Smart City branding is essential.** All cities in the world -whether they are global capitals or small towns-, are currently developing a large number of projects in different areas. However, it is not effective to communicate them all without priority -which is what happens in many cases. It is key for cities instead to **design a strategy and to communicate according to it,** prioritizing quality over quantity.

In the complexity of this context, **Anteverti has designed a new methodology for assessing and creating Smart Cities' branding.** The methodology is named **PDMBP©**

(which stands for **Purpose, DNA, Market Research, Branding and Positioning**), and it aims to help cities to brand themselves as Smart Cities in a clever and effective way, gaining recognition on the competitive global map.

4 successful examples of Smart City Branding

In recent years, **Anteverti has advised** some of the world's most dynamic capitals — **Seoul and Madrid** — on **leveraging smart city branding to effectively showcase their strengths as leading Smart Cities on the global stage**. As part of these engagements, we first **analyzed the Smart City brands of 20 major cities** worldwide and ranked them using our proprietary methodological tool, which helped us answer the following questions:

- Do the **messages and narratives** these cities communicate through their brands **reflect their Smart City models and strategies**?
- How effectively do these brands transmit the cities' **Unique Selling Points** —distinctive elements that differentiate them from competitors— and value proposition?
- Are they using the **optimal channels and tools to reach their target audience**—whether digitally or in-person?

Taking all these elements into consideration, we **determined the communicational consistency of these Smart City brands**. Out of these 20, we would like to share **four of the most successful cases** — which interestingly have found different but effective ways to respond to their specific needs.

CASE 1 | SINGAPORE

Smart Nation Singapore Merging the Smart City with national identity

Singapore is more than just a city; it is also a state. That is why **its Smart City strategy is inseparably a Smart Nation strategy**. Embracing this distinctive and unique reality, this country of Southeast Asia has **crafted a brand that proudly presents itself** to the world as the sole Smart City that embodies... **a Smart Nation**.

This strategic move —**which highlights the country's Unique Selling Point**— is brilliantly positioning Singapore at the forefront. By incorporating the **term 'Nation'** into its **core brand identity**, Singapore automatically **rises over its competitors**, evoking a powerful mental image of elevated conceptual hierarchy and global relevance. As a result, **no other city brand can match the impact** and resonance Singapore creates on a global scale.



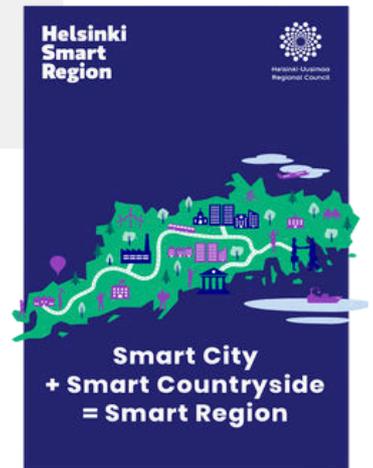
SusHi Tech Tokyo A brand linked to an unmistakable identity

Japan is a boundless source of global icons, but is there anything more easily relatable to the Land of the Rising Sun than **sushi**? Aware of this, the creators of the recently launched **Tokyo Smart City** brand ingeniously leveraged **this cultural asset to align it with the Smart City model** promoted by the Japanese capital. Thus, the concept of SusHi Tech Tokyo (an acronym for **Sustainable High City Tech Tokyo**) emerges from this fusion.

The **brand identity goes beyond wordplay**, seeking to capture and showcase the **essence of the city's strategy and know-how**. Mirroring the transformation of a simple fish into a delicacy through master artisanship, the SusHi Tech Tokyo concept embodies the city's commitment to harnessing Japan's cutting-edge technology, diverse ideas, and digital expertise to create a future made by and for people.



Helsinki Smart Region



Helsinki Smart Region Joining forces to compete globally

Promoting economic vitality is a fundamental objective in **Smart City Branding**, and Helsinki's strategy and brand, **Helsinki Smart Region**, align with this goal. Following in the footsteps of Singapore, **the brand goes beyond the traditional city concept—the region—to accentuate an element that amplifies its competitiveness** and international appeal.

In the case of Helsinki's brand, the aim is **to establish not only the city but also an entire innovation ecosystem as a global powerhouse**, harnessing the potential of both its metropolitan area and its rural surroundings. Moreover, it involves leveraging the renowned reputation of the country's capital to fuel economic growth in the neighboring and less known Uusimaa region. **By aligning with the Helsinki Smart Region brand, Uusimaa can overcome the obstacles it would encounter when seeking individual recognition** in today's fiercely competitive global environment.

Ultimately, **this integration strategy is a win-win solution that maximizes collective recognition**, expands the region's global impact, and enhances the value proposition of both Helsinki and the Uusimaa region for **foreign investors and stakeholders**.



CASE 4 | AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

Amsterdam Smart City & Circular Amsterdam

Two needs, two brands

Is it necessary for a city to have a single Smart City brand? While it is commonly seen, there are no strict guidelines enforcing this. In reality, **brands are created to fulfill specific purposes**, sometimes broader or more general, and at other times very specific. In certain cases, **cities have diverse communication needs that are effectively conveyed through different brands**.

Amsterdam exemplifies this. On one hand, the Dutch city has developed **the brand Circular Amsterdam**, which aims to globally promote its groundbreaking city model. This brand revolves around the **innovative strategy of the same name**, with a vision to transform Amsterdam into one of the world's pioneering cities based on a circular economy that respects the Earth's finite resources by 2050.

On the other hand, **Amsterdam also promotes the brand and platform Amsterdam Smart City**, with a strong focus on economic development. It serves as **a hub for both public and private innovation professionals to exchange updates, explore opportunities, tackle challenges, collaborate on projects, and participate in events related to innovation and sustainability initiatives**. This is how these two distinct purposes are effectively addressed through differentiated branding strategies.

Good Smart City branding: a brief conclusion

What **common elements** do these four successful cases of Smart City Branding share?

- Firstly, **all the brands have a strong foundation in a comprehensive city strategy**, originating from a firm **political commitment at the highest level** of the city — even the nation — government.
- Secondly, **these brands effectively leverage and highlight a distinctive and defining characteristic of the cities they represent**, which sets them apart and grants them uniqueness.
- Lastly, all these brands **revolve around a captivating and accessible narrative**, enabling the global audience to **grasp the city's value proposition** quickly and concisely.

These three elements serve as the **fundamental pillars of successful Smart City Branding**. ●

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