

Zoo tops Jets as province's top brand

The most valued brand in Manitoba has nothing to do with putting a puck in the net, banking and investments, beer or fast food. It has everything to do with four-legged and feathered friends and taking a simulated trip to Churchill Zoo.

TREVOR HAGAN / THE CANADIAN PRESS FILES

There is much passion for the Winnipeg Jets, but not everyone can afford Jets tickets.

Assiniboine Park Zoo has topped the first-ever McKim BrandWatch poll, a market study of 30 of the highest-profile local brands in the province. National and international brands were excluded from the report.

Red River Co-op gas bars, the Manitoba Museum, the Winnipeg Jets and the University of Manitoba round out the top five.

McKim Communications commissioned Probe Research to conduct quantitative research to determine consumer perceptions of brand attributes, including "trust," "attachment" and "net promoter score." The latter measures how likely someone would be to recommend an organization to others.

Peter George, CEO of McKim, one of Winnipeg's leading advertising agencies, said it was a little surprising to see the zoo outpace the Jets, considering how little the zoo spends on advertising its Journey to Churchill and other exhibits in the province.

"You see billboards and some bus ads, but the zoo has done a phenomenal job of saving orphaned polar bears. There are newspaper articles on cute, fuzzy polar bears, and it's a must-see thing for a lot of people when they come to town. A lot of people say (to others), 'Go to the zoo.' Not everyone can afford to go to a Jets game," he said.

Scott MacKay, president of Probe, agreed.

"The Jets are high entertainment with highly paid millionaires skating around on the ice. A lot of people can't afford it," he said.

Few brands have received the amount of media attention, both good and bad, the Canadian Museum for

Human Rights has garnered before its fall 2014 opening and since. Even so, the CMHR ranked 25th on the list. George said he was initially surprised at the ranking but changed his mind once he examined the data. He said it simply hasn't been around long enough to make a significant impression in the psyche of Manitobans.

"The Manitoba Museum has been in the community for generations. Pretty much everybody went there as a kid," he said.

MacKay said the CMHR brand still bears the lingering effects of negative stories about being late and over budget and the controversial selection of exhibits.

"Because it's so new, the chance for people to get warmly attached to it isn't there yet. Time isn't working with it yet," he said.

There are some indicators; however, the CMHR is carving out a niche in the community and elsewhere. For example, it drew 400,000 visitors during its first year, significantly outpacing its goal of 250,000. It has also won 24 international, national and regional awards, and New York-based Travel and Leisure magazine recently called it, "one of the top five coolest destinations in the world."

Manitoba Hydro is the leading choice when it comes to Crown corporations in the province, ringing in at No. 12, slightly ahead of Manitoba Public Insurance (No. 14) and Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries (No. 15).

"Hydro is essential. It's not luxury. People just feel good about Hydro," MacKay said. "As it relates to its Power Smart program, that's why (Manitoba Progressive Conservative) Leader Brian Pallister refuses to talk about it. He knows it's a sacred trust," he said.

George agreed on the rationale for Hydro's brand positioning in the province.

"That's telling me there's a lot of trust for Hydro for something. Maybe it's delivering electricity or natural gas on a dependable basis or getting the power back on quickly when it goes out," he said.

The University of Manitoba was the top brand in the post-secondary education category and No. 5 overall, slightly ahead of Red River College (No. 8) and the University of Winnipeg (No. 9).

George said it's important to note while the U of M has the broadest reach in the province, it is also competing directly with the CMHR, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, hospitals, charities and other entities for fundraising in the province for its recently announced \$500-million capital campaign.

Brandon University, meanwhile, largely limits its marketing to the southwestern part of the province and therefore doesn't have much of a presence in Winnipeg.

"Brandon doesn't do things that get broader provincial notice like the U of M or U of W do. When Lloyd Axworthy was the president at U of W, he was seen as the mover and shaker in post-secondary education in the province. He transformed their campus," he said.

Manitoba Blue Cross emerged as the top brand in the insurance sector at No. 11, ahead of the province's biggest public company, Great-West Lifeco, at No. 23 and Wawanesa Insurance at No. 28.

"Blue Cross is practically everybody's work plan," George said. "They've done a really great job of being ingrained in the work lives of Manitobans. People don't say, 'I need to get travel insurance.' They say, 'I need to get Blue Cross.' They're almost the Kleenex of this category, and they've done it without a massive advertising presence. The trust factor and attachment with them is very high."

MTS is ranked 22nd and is the only Manitoba-based telco examined in the study. George said its challenge is to maintain the level of trust it has built up over the years



JOE BRYKSA / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS FILES
One of two polar bear cubs from Churchill, Manitoba now at the Leatherdale International Polar Bear Conservation Centre at Assiniboine Park

as Manitobans become more familiar with its national competitors.

"The others are looked at as outsiders and opportunists. We all have problems with our cell providers over the cost. Most of them don't provide great service, so we change plans based on who is giving us the best deal and who has the latest technology. I know people who switch (providers) based on which one is going to give them three months of free service," he said.

More than 1,300 members of Probe Research's proprietary online panel completed the survey. Roughly half participated in the first phase between March 19 and April 26, and the balance took the second phase in September.

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