



Downtown Yonge

Urban Regeneration And Branding Program
Case Study



Visual identity

The name Downtown Yonge is rendered in fun, colourful circles using a hand-drawn lettering to celebrate the diversity in the area. The identity is applied consistently on all applications printed, digital and 3-dimensional throughout the area.

Introduction and Summary

Over a decade ago the Yonge Street Business and Residents Association (YSBRA) and the City of Toronto formally commenced the collaboration known as the Yonge Street Regeneration Program. At the time, downtown Yonge Street was in a downward spiral in the quality of its built environment, retail activity and customer base. Once a destination for commerce and entertainment it had lost its place and Torontonians were becoming alienated from their “Main Street”, as were better quality retailers and developers. Now, due largely to the activities of the Regeneration Program and the establishment of a Business Improvement Area (BIA), that spiral has been halted and positive impact is felt.

The redevelopment of the Downtown Yonge BIA created a focused opportunity to communicate essential messages about the new Yonge Street to key audiences: local and international retailers, entertainment and restaurant users; the greater Toronto area general public; and national and international tourists.

To help all stakeholders become aware of these positive initiatives, the BIA undertook a significant rebranding program including public consultation to understand key perceptions of the current area and desired impressions that a new Downtown Yonge must make.

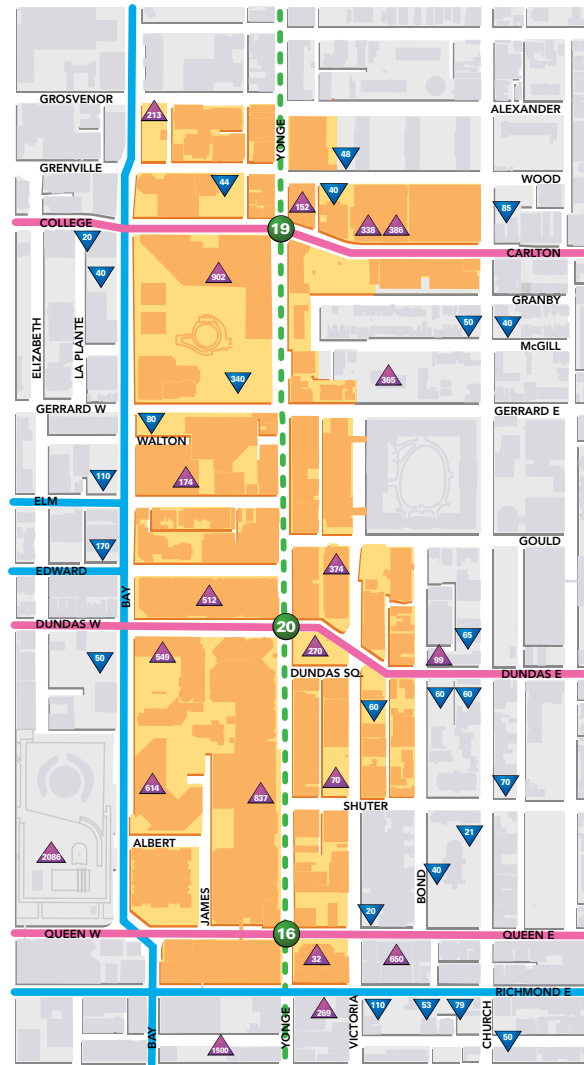
A new name, positioning, messaging strategy and imagery consistently applied throughout the area would contribute to the marketing objectives by helping to attract retailers, corporate investment, and increased revenue for merchants as a result of a growing interest from tourists and local residents in the vast array of services provided in this retail area.

The challenge was to position the Downtown Yonge Street area as a vibrant, multicultural, business, residential, retail, dining and entertainment district. It should be thought of as both the hub and the heart of the great City of Toronto. There is truly something for everyone in the district. It would be the intention, not to simply make the neighborhood a local novelty, rather to create/develop the mystique and reputation that the area deserves.



Branded Traffic Poles

So far 26 branded traffic poles have been installed at major intersections along Yonge Street. These multi-purpose poles demarcate the area and form an elegant, fun and highly visible branded presence, while providing the structural support for the annual cross street holiday décor program.



Program definition

The target zone for the Regeneration Program was defined as the area of Yonge Street extending from Richmond St. to Grosvenor/Alexander, east to Church St. and west to Bay St.

One of the major initiatives identified by the BIA was to rebrand the area to help change the negative perception of Yonge Street and to communicate all of the new and positive developments in the area.

Fundamental changes were being brought about in the quality of the physical environment and the availability of buildings to effectively accommodate contemporary retail and entertainment facilities. A successful facade improvement program saw a City investment of approximately \$330,000 in grants to 18 property owners matched by direct investment by those owners of over \$2.0 million.

The regeneration project had two major objectives:

- to bring about a substantial improvement to the physical appearance of the area, creating a strong sense of place, and
- to bring about a substantial amount of new, up-to-date retail and entertainment space, including premises for a large mega-plex cinema to anchor the Project.

Marketing and publicity

The approval of the Regeneration project by City Council created the necessary basis for moving forward with the marketing of the Street, as it provided something to stimulate interest in the marketplace. Two objectives were established:

- to create a strong “branding” concept for the area, and graphic materials which could be used to assist in marketing the area, and
- to generate publicity which would reach the attention of both local Canadian and US-based retailers.



Holiday Décor

The annual lighting program features the installation of 21 cross-street displays along Yonge Street. The lighting features blue and white LED sticks arranged in a diverse pattern with a central star along the median of the street.

Branding Downtown Yonge

Market research is an essential part of any branding program. A market research project was undertaken with the objective of eliciting consumer reaction to potential branding options and importantly, to gather insight into approaches that were most appropriate to perceptions of the revitalization project. Focus groups with 20-somethings and 30-somethings were undertaken. The concept of the revitalization project was explained to the respondents and participants were shown a series of messages, potential names and visual elements that would represent the area in a believable but exciting way.

Overall, respondents indicated highly positive responses to the concept of, and plans to, revitalize the downtown area of Yonge Street. Many of the respondents had negative impressions of the area as a whole mentioning congestion, lack of variety and quality, and vagrancy as issues of perceived negativity. As a result respondents were highly enthusiastic about a concept that would address their concerns and incorporate positive aspects of areas of the City where they enjoyed spending time.

Key sentiments that appealed well to respondents were: “something for everyone”; “you don’t have to plan” and “it’s always happening on Yonge”. Imagery that appealed to respondents included “fine dining”;

“multiculturalism” and “candlelight”. The appeal of these images largely lay in the fact they represented the elements considered to be currently lacking in the area and therefore indicate a sense of change and improvement.

Design ideas were presented and virtually all were positively received. The design that was combined with the name “Downtown Yonge” was seen as the most effective in conveying the key attributes of the Positioning Statement and in suggesting vibrancy, newness, renewal and excitement. It was also felt that the opportunity for “edginess” or drama in the name was limited by a need to ensure that the name and tagline take into account consumers’ demand for a “safer and cleaner” Yonge Dundas area and that it appeals to a cross-section of age groups. Those over 30 were more receptive to names/taglines/logos that highlight the potential benefits of the area (including diversity, variety, activity) while reflecting their interests and tastes.

Downtown Yonge Anytime. One Place.

The logo combined with the tagline reflects a favourable assessment of the proposed changes while suggesting a new excitement; an energy that is associated with cultural diversity; and, perceived benefits associated with diverse shopping options and a range of entertainment activities.



Yonge Street Lighting
Christmas tree lighting in the square and feature lighting programs along Yonge Street provide a family activity for the season that ties into the overall branding program.

Ideas Drive Perception

Our challenge was to position Downtown Yonge as a vibrant, multicultural, business, residential, retail, dining and entertainment district. It should be thought of as the both the hub and the heart of Toronto. There is truly something for everyone in the district. It was our intention, not to simply make the neighborhood a local novelty, rather to create and develop the international mystique and reputation that the area deserves.

Creating an identity to be carried through all levels of service and business required a coordinated effort. An identity must clearly and viscerally identify the promise and expectations of the development program. The Yonge Street identity is a source of consistency throughout all elements of communication and helps to create a new excitement about an

existing and established area. Combining these goals into one vision created smart communication, built trust within the community, and encouraged outside investment.

The Downtown Yonge BIA have invested considerable time in researching and understanding the issues that will impact the branding of the area. The intention with the branding was to build on this learning and understanding to help to improve and promote the Downtown Yonge Street area and to heighten its position as Toronto's premier shopping, business and entertainment destination.