



# CASE STUDY: PLACE BRANDING FOR MUNICIPALITIES

FCM INTERNATIONAL

## The Case of Regina, Canada



### INTRODUCTION

In 1998 an ordinary citizen would change the image and perception of Regina. A local optometrist suggested his professional association host their national conference in his hometown, Regina. He was met with great opposition from the conference committee: their perception of the city was entirely distasteful. Full of civic pride and shocked by their reaction, the optometrist wrote his MP, Mayor and prominent business leaders imploring them to work on the “image” of the city. The following year a Mayor’s Task Force began an Image Improvement Exercise, which led to the formation of a new logo. While a new logo for the community was a good start, many city stakeholders noted that it didn’t deliver the results they were looking for and that Regina needed a methodology and strategy to change its perception. In 2006 a formal place-brand strategy began when many community stakeholders approached city council. Council subsequently approved the project to develop of a strategic brand for the City of Regina. The brand strategy plan included funding over a five-year period to develop and maintain the brand across the community.

This case study reviews the methodology used by the City of Regina to develop its place-branding strategy. Considering context, we will discuss success factors and best practices in developing a place-brand for municipalities.



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## Place-Branding General Context

In the world of consumer goods, we understand that a brand is the sum of all experiences related to the product and service. Meaning, brand perceptions are shaped by functional experiences like quality, reliability etc., as well as emotional experiences associated with the product. This is no less true in place branding: the place brand exists in the mind of the citizen.

Every citizen in a city, region and nation has a perception of that place. Through their actions and beliefs they express the brand. **Complex brand perceptions about place are created over time and through functionality and experience.** For cities, that means looking at the livability (i.e. functionality) and quality of life (i.e. citizen experience) of our cities, and understanding how that shapes our citizens' perception and what they believe to be true about place.

Place-branding is relatively new for both economic developers and communications professionals alike, and it is fast becoming an important tool for local economic development. Theoretically, place-branding has evolved as an interdisciplinary field of study bringing together international relations, foreign policy, urban planning, social psychology and business marketing. Put into practice, place-branding has recently gained prominence as globalization had led to increasing competition amongst cities in attracting tourists, inhabitants and investment in their region. Nations, regions and cities are looking for ways to differentiate themselves through branding. The purpose of place-branding is generally understood as:

- To increase attractiveness of companies and investments
- To promote tourism
- To promote public diplomacy
- To support interest of import and export industry
- To strengthen citizens identity and increases self-esteem

Nations, regions and cities around the world are defining their place-brand and creating marketing strategies to achieve these goals. Regina is one Canadian City who has boldly applied place-branding and marketing techniques to enhance its local economic development.

## Regina in Context

A city's brand is inevitably linked to its history. Founded in the middle of an "arid and featureless grassland" in 1882, Regina evolved as Saskatchewan's

capital city. Regina has served as the cultural and commercial centre for the southern part of the province with a rich and colourful history. Famed Canadian politician Louis Reil staged a riot there in 1885, and the city eventually become know for its political activism and forward-thinking social programs. As the second largest city in the province, Regina cultivated a strong natural resource-based economy. The city had few topographical features, and unfortunately, much of its built heritage boasting its rich history had been demolished in redevelopments. Its reputation as a featureless grassland began to precede it, prompting Regina to redefine its brand.

## Branding Regina

A distinguishing feature of Regina's branding campaign is that it was prompted by both passionate citizens and the community. The Mayor and Council responded to community concern by supporting an Image Improvement Project in 2006. It was clear that the city needed much more than a logo, and they launched an inclusive brand development process. The defined goals for the branding process included:

- Attract new citizens, business, investment, events, and stay competitive with other communities.
- Ability to define ourselves, rather than allow others to define our community for us.
- Clean up confusion and build consistency in our messaging.<sup>1</sup>

The goals articulated a new brand aimed at developing a dynamic way to promote the city's unique identity to both the internal community whom the city serves, and the external community the city wished to attract. The overall goal was to enhance local economic development in the community with messaging that would support attraction of investment, talent, and tourism.

The first action Regina took to develop its place-brand was to hire a Brand Manager to coordinate the program. Not all municipalities have the ability to hire a dedicated professional for this role, however it should be noted that significant staff resources are needed to manage the process of place-brand identity formation, define the strategic plan, and execute and coordinate the tactical marketing activities. In addition to the full-time hire, Regina worked with a communications agency to develop the methodology, execute key elements of the research, assist with the creative design of the brand, and develop the subsequent marketing plan. Below is an outline and discussion of Regina's place-brand methodology.

Place-branding typically has six phases of development. In this case study, we outline each phase, discuss Regina's context and suggest best-practices.

<sup>1</sup>Interview with City of Regina Brand Manager, Nathan Morrison.

## PLACE-BRAND METHODOLOGY

### 1) Form Stakeholder Group

It has been noted by several place-branding experts that it is imperative to have stakeholder and community involvement when developing a place-brand. Stakeholders provide a variety of insight and perspectives. A stakeholder can be defined as someone or some organization that has a vested interest in the success of your community, and or whose role is to support community and economic growth. Typical stakeholders include local politicians, economic development officials, Chamber of Commerce, tourism board, local college or university, etc. Each municipality will have a unique list of stakeholders. What matters to developing the place-brand is that a broad group is engaged to support the place-branding process, and that stakeholders are given ownership of the process. Regina formed three stakeholder groups:

- a. **Main stakeholders:** The primary stakeholders included representatives from the traditional organizations and institutions involved in the many facets of local and community economic development. Their primary stakeholders included the Regina Regional Opportunities Commission; Regina Downtown; Regina Warehouse District; Regina and Region Chamber of Commerce; City of Regina.
- b. **Business:** Given that a key goal and eventual performance indicator for the place-brand was to attract new investment and retain current business, the city of Regina created a second group of stakeholders comprised of owners and senior executives from the city's largest employers, and key sectors for growth.
- c. **Youth:** Attracting and retaining talent had become a challenge for Regina, so a separate stakeholder group was set up to engage the emerging workforce.

The stakeholder groups served as a foundation to not only gather research and insight, but also to create momentum and support in the community. Stakeholders will participate in focus groups and provide feedback that is imperative to the place-brand development process. Often times the stakeholders become municipal "brand champions," meaning they will play an active role in shaping the finished product and will ultimately be asked to promote the brand and ask others to participate.

### 2) Internal Communication Audit

An internal communications audit is a thorough evaluation of your current communication efforts. A communications audit will ask how an organization communicates and whether or not its communications are effective. This is generally the first step in communications planning, and it is comprised of mostly qualitative research of internal communication materials. The municipality's

brand or communications manager traditionally does the Communication Audit. Alternatively, an external agency is hired to support the place-branding initiative. Results of the audit will help articulate the municipality's current brand positioning, identify gaps, and set the foundation for further research. Results from this process are shared with the Stakeholder groups. In Regina, both the Brand Manger and communications agency conducted the internal communications audit. The Brand Manger coordinated with the agency to gather relevant information and the agency provided insight and content analysis.

### 3) Research

With a thorough communications audit, a place-branding team is ready to develop their research tools and questions. An analysis of the audit will identify gaps, and generate questions the place-branding team will want to know. These questions focus on understand the perception of their municipality. Typically, general research questions are articulated to help identify what data or information will need to be gathered in order to develop their place-brand. Here are some sample research questions: What are my citizens saying about my municipality and what perceptions do my target audiences have about my municipality? Once you have identified the larger research questions, you can develop tools and tactics to answers them. This form of research is both quantitative and qualitative, and can involve many different kinds of tactics: surveys, interviews, focus groups, and workshops. A critical phase of the research development and execution is identifying your key audience. In most cases, municipalities are considering three key audiences in the place-branding process: residents, stakeholders, and key external markets. Regina used a mix-method approach to reach all audiences. Their research included a blend of telephone surveys and focus groups in external markets, and interviews, surveys, and workshops with internal audiences and the stakeholder groups.

- a. **External Surveys:** In order to understand how their external audience perceived its brand, Regina conducted 1200 telephone surveys in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Ontario. These markets were identified as places where Regina could effectively attract investment and talent. The Brand Manager worked with the agency to develop the survey, and the agency's team conducted the interviews.
- b. **External Focus Groups:** In a focus group people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes toward your municipality. Following their survey, Regina wanted to have a better understanding of how the city was perceived externally. The communications agency arranged focus groups in Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Windsor, and Calgary. Participants were selected at random by a local research firm. A traditional focus group has 10–15 participants.

- c. **Internal Surveys:** Similar to external surveys, questionnaires were developed and circulated among residents of Regina. Participants were also selected at random with research conducted by the agency.
- d. **Internal Focus Groups:** Local residents were also invited to participate in discussions through local focus groups. Focus group feedback provides high-level information from the general population of your municipality. This local feedback is imperative in the strategy and platform development of place-branding because it identifies perceptions that need to be changed or reinforced.
- e. **Stakeholder Surveys, Focus Groups, and Workshops:** We noted earlier that stakeholder engagement is imperative to place-brand development. The individuals and organizations in the stakeholder groups have a vested interest in the municipality's success, or mandate to support economic and community growth. Regina's Brand Manger worked with the communications agency to create a survey for the Stakeholders. In addition to this, the Brand Manager conducted one on one interviews with each Stakeholder.

The research phase of place-branding typically takes 4-8 months. Many variables will impact the timing including your experience, team resources, political climate and participant response. Once a municipality has identified their target market and they key questions they want answered, they must create the tools to answer their questions. For instance, if you want to understand how your target market perceives, you have to develop a survey with questions that will help answer those questions, then deliver the survey for your target market. In the case of Regina, the research phase took 10 months. This was longer than anticipated, but they had a municipal election that impacted the timeline.

**4) Analysis and Platform Development**

Once research is gathered from the key audiences across the main tools, the Brand Manager and or communications agency will review the content and identify consistent themes. Identifying consistent themes will help a place-branding strategist to better define two things. First, consistent positive themes will demonstrate strengths the municipality can build its brand on. Second, consistent negative themes will identify what the municipal brand has to combat or what objections the municipal positioning statement must address. Surveys, focus groups, workshops, and interviews will produce a variety of qualitative and quantitative data. Both are useful in the place-branding analysis. The next phase of analysis in place-branding puts extra effort on looking at how much both the internal and external markets/audiences know about the municipality. We call this determining the "brand equity". Brand equity is a term marketers use to describe the value of a brand. Customers' knowledge of a brand is part of this equity

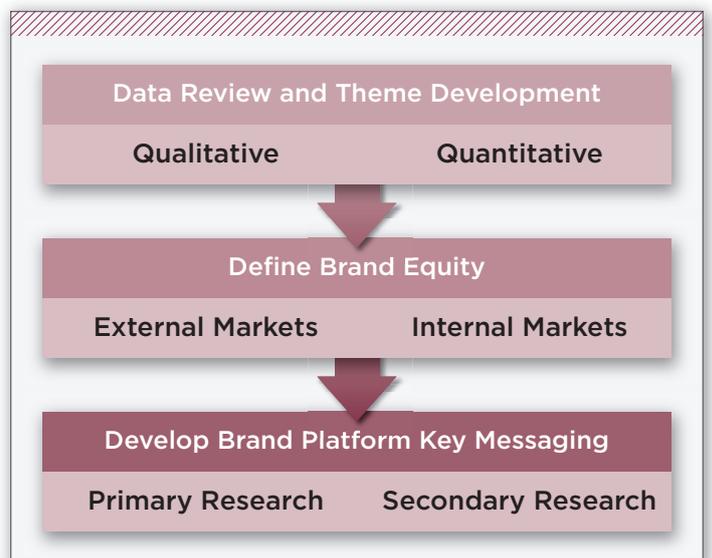
and will influence the communication strategy. For municipalities, that means understanding what your local community and external competitors or target audiences know about your municipal strengths, services, and opportunities.

Once the key themes and brand equity are identified, the Brand Manger will develop the "brand platform". This document highlights key analysis and makes recommendations about the key messaging that needs to be developed for the municipality. The brand platform document will also start to articulate a visual and creative direction for the place-brand development.

In the case of Regina, through analysis they learned that despite their recent economic success the city did not have much equity in external markets and that there wasn't a direct correlation between the success of the province and Regina. More than this, they identified two recurring themes: Regina's opportunities and quality of life. As one survey respondent put it: "It's all about opportunity, endless opportunity, stretching out around us, just like our horizon." Statements like this and other qualitative and quantitative data inform the brand platform document and the eventual messaging that will be used to articulate and communicate the place-brand. The analysis and platform development phase generally takes 1-2 months.

Table 1 outlines the main steps of the Analysis and Platform for Strategy Development, which are:

- a. Review of qualitative and quantitative research to identify consistent themes
- b. Determine brand equity in both internal and external markets (to inform strategic direction).
- c. Brand platform document developed Brand Manager (key messaging and hints toward visual identity and key assets) based on primary and secondary research.



**Table 1: Stages of Brand Platform Development**

### 5) Visual and Verbal Identity and Creative Development

With the place-brand document in hand, Brand Mangers are able to begin developing the creative brand identity. **Creating a place-brand involves both a visual and verbal identity.** The visual identity consists of the images, colours, and artistic expression of the municipality's unique personality and reflection of its vibrant energy. The verbal identity is a systems of words and phrases that have been developed to reflect the essence of the verbal brand the municipality wishes to project to its audiences: its values, attributes, and personality. The verbal identity is often called a "positioning statement" that is based on the research, grounded in facts, but also aspirational, meaning it provides a vision for the municipality.

Visual and verbal brand identities are typically developed with a communications agency. Several samples will be provided and the Brand Manager and main stakeholder group will make decisions on the direction, based on the analysis. Once an identity is created, the Brand Manager will test it. Testing the visual and verbal brand identity involves hosting a focus group to gauge people's reaction to and thoughts about the place-brand. Minor edits can be made based on testing feedback.

Based on what Regina learned through its research, and keeping in mind their primary goal for the place-brand, Regina created "infinite horizons" as their positioning statement and adopted a visual identity to reinforce this message. Their identity included a logo design and colours that reinforced the idea for infinite possibilities. See Appendix A for examples of their visual and verbal place-brand, as well as a summary of Regina's brand book.

### 6) Campaign Launch

Once the place-brand is developed, the fun begins: launching the brand. There are many ways to launch a place-brand. With multiple community stakeholders involved and participation from the community, it makes sense to launch the campaign internally to the community. But to achieve the goals of attracting investment, the campaign will be launched in external markets.



Regina's new logo captures its value proposition.

Regina officially launched their new place-brand internally Feb. 2010 at the Mayor's State of the City Address. The Mayor's breakfast was an ideal event to launch the brand as it pulls together a broad spectrum of community stakeholders and media. Regina's external launch of the place-brand took place one month later at the Vancouver Winter Olympics Saskatchewan Pavilion. In this case the timing was serendipitous, but the Brand Manager knew that the Saskatchewan Pavilion provided an unprecedented opportunity to reach a broad audience.

With their goals to attract new citizens, business, investment, events, and stay competitive with other communities, Regina developed their place-brand with the external market in mind and with the intention to launch marketing campaigns nationally and internationally.

In the fall of 2010, seven months after their initial launch, Regina ran an external campaign called "Hello Regina" in Calgary. Calgary had been identified as a target market through the research process: it was noted that residents from Saskatchewan had migrated to Calgary, and the campaign sought to attract them back. The campaign in Calgary aimed to position Regina as a desirable place to seek future opportunities, and to



Ad samples from Hello Regina's campaign.

recruit new residents and attract investment. Working with the visual and verbal brand identity, the campaign included advertising on outdoor billboards, in transit shelters, geo-targeted online ads including real estate and job search sites. The messaging of the ads built off of Regina's "infinite horizons" positioning statement by demonstrating that quality of life and professional success are both possible in Regina. An overview of the "Hello Regina" campaign is attached to this report as Appendix B. The campaign was noted as part of the city's "managed-growth" strategy seeking to attract people and investment opportunities. The "Hello Regina" campaign was considered a success, as the likelihood of Calgarian's moving to Regina went from 4.2% to 7.3% and those who recalled seeing the campaign were more likely to have a positive impression of Regina.

### Post place-brand and Lessons Learned

Perhaps the greatest attribute to Regina's place-branding initiative is that it was driven by the community. One concerned citizen challenged city officials and stakeholders to develop and deliver a positive message about Regina. City leaders and stakeholders were wise to respond to the citizen's concerns because they were able to use that interest to help fuel the development of their place-brand with broad community engagement. **Regina's Brand Manager noted that community engagement was the most important part of discovering the assets and amenities that differentiated Regina, and was ultimately a significant part of forming the place-brand identity.**

Community engagement takes time and much coordination, as such, Regina's place-branding research took longer than anticipated. Additional time was spent with each stakeholder group, which proved to be an important piece of the place-brand success. Also typical to municipal projects, an election occurred in the middle of forming the place-brand and launching the campaign. The election timeline stalled the launch of the brand as senior city staff decided to hold off on the launch until after the election. While the initial team organizing the place-branding exercise and campaign had hoped to complete the project in 8-9 months, it took closer to 12. Important factors for success were noted as:

- **Broad stakeholder engagement:** working with representatives from important cultural, political and institutional organizations, and making sure that those representatives believe in the project.
- **Community engagement:** inviting the citizens to participate in the process and provide feedback.
- **Political will:** a Mayor and Council that understands the role a place-brand can play in attracting investment, talent and tourism.
- **Well-designed methodology:** working with a team of professionals who could develop and manage the process while providing insight.

Overall, the Regina place-brand exercise is considered a success. As with any project of this scope, challenges are bound to arise. When launching the place-brand and eventual campaign, the biggest challenge was internal coordination with all the relevant stakeholders. It takes time for each organization to adapt their programs and messaging to the new branding scheme. Much follow up was required to ensure that the key brand messaging was being included in stakeholder outreach. The Regina Place Brand Manager noted that a place-brand maintenance program should be established to ensure proper follow up with each stakeholder is achieved and that the city is providing relevant information and visuals to support the stakeholders' use of the place-brand.

### CONCLUSION

With increasing globalized competition to attract investment, talent, tourism, nations, and regions, municipalities are striving to differentiate themselves. Differentiation and a strong value proposition for investment start with a solid place-brand. In order to develop a strong place-brand, the city of Regina had to look honestly at their current negative perception of place and develop a brand image that reflected the wealth of opportunity in their city. **By listening to citizens and engaging members from their target audience in different cities across the country, they were able to discover and articulate their identity and also address the objections to their city.** Through a clear place-brand methodology, they were able to take a reputation of being an "arid featureless grassland," and turn that into a place of "infinite horizons" where opportunities span as wide as the plains.

## APPENDIX A

# Regina's 2010 External Marketing Campaign

### Objective

- Develop a sharply targeted external campaign in Calgary that:

Changes peoples' perceptions about Regina.

- 1) Puts Regina on the list of desirable places in which to seek one's future.
- 2) Ultimately recruits new residents and attracts investment to our community.

### Audience

- Primary target group is broadly categorized as working-aged adults who commute daily (male and female) aged 22-45.
- Emphasis will be on professional couples with younger children, and younger couples considering starting a family.

### Messaging

- Overarching Message — You don't need to compromise quality of life to achieve professional success.
- Use of two Pillars — Family & Career

### Family Pillar

- Get home, and get a home, faster.
- In this smaller, well-planned city you will spend less time commuting and more time with your family doing more of the things you enjoy.
- You will be coming home to a house you can afford in a safe, welcoming community.

### Professional Pillar

- In this vibrant market, you can fast track your professional success in a supportive, collaborative business environment where things are really happening.
- Regina's economic growth is holding fast.

### Media Approach

- Campaign timing is mid-October to mid-November when:
  - Residents have settled back into their routines.
  - Commuter traffic volumes are high.
- Outdoor — prime billboard locations.
- Transit — Bus Rapid Transit & Light Rail Transit.

- Online — geo targeted includes housing & job sites.
- Medium becomes the messaging.

### “Goodbye... Hello...”

- Concept will pull from two primary message pillars to position Regina lifestyles and professional opportunities favourably vs. those in Calgary.
- Two Phases (2 week “Teaser” and 2 week “Reveal”)



## Media

- Strategically placed **Outdoor & Transit boards** along commuter routes and downtown.
- **Online advertising** including calgaryherald.com, calgarysun.com, working.com, workopolis.com, canoe.com, kijiji.ca (jobs, housing)
- Linked to HelloRegina.ca URL.

## Experience Marketing

- Three street team executions directly line up with and support campaign messaging and will occur over a three day period (first week of November) with partner Captive Audience.
- Development of the stunts is continuing and includes intercepts & interactions with our target audience in lifestyle and professional settings and includes short “passing-by” interactions and a small premium gift from Regina.

## Street Team Interactions

- Goodbye Sitting with Strangers — Transit riders will have interactions with the street team as they exit LRT & BRT stops downtown and discuss lower commute times and more time for family.
- Goodbye Heavy Debt — Outside major banks downtown the street team will demonstrate the attractive discretionary income of Regina residents.
- Goodbye Gridlock — At busy crosswalks, parkade entrances, and busy streets quality of life messages demonstrated by the street team through the use of iPads.

## Earned & Social Media

- At reveal, Social Media News Releases will be issued to Calgary, Regina & national media.
- Embargoed interviews with media partners.
- Social media elements will include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube & Flickr.

## Fulfilment

- The campaign call to action will be an invitation to visit the unique HelloRegina.ca URL.
- The unique URL will point to the specific section of InfiniteHorizons.ca and act as the fulfillment piece for the campaign.
- Interactive videos and social media will be integrated onto HelloRegina.ca

## Measurement

- Pre & Post Campaign Survey
- Website traffic
- Earned & Social media tracking

## Budget

Gross Media	\$75,000
Fees & Production	\$75,000
Stunt Execution & Premiums	\$40,000
Pre & Post Research	\$14,000
Photography	\$5,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$209,000</b>

## Regina is Ready

- Community initiative supported by numerous stakeholders and is the first major external campaign ever by our community with this type of messaging.
- Campaign is based on research conducted during the development of the community brand and is intended to put our community on the choice list for those looking for family & professional success.

## APPENDIX B

## Hello Regina — Campaign Backgrounder

Regina is actively seeking to recruit new residents — inviting professionals to succeed in a vibrant economy, and families to thrive in a welcoming community. Calgary is the first market.

**WHAT:** Hello Regina is an innovative resident recruitment campaign targeting new residents using:

- Billboards, LTR and BTR posters, and online ads that challenge Calgarians to say goodbye to quality of life issues, and say hello to the solutions offered in Regina;
- Street teams chatting with Calgary commuters about what Regina has to offer.

**WHO:** Campaign authored by Regina stakeholders that includes the City of Regina and Regina Regional Opportunities Commission

**WHERE:** Calgary, Alberta

**WHEN:** October–November 2010

**WHY:** It's time to begin telling the world, starting with Calgary, what a vibrant place Regina is and about the opportunities that exist there. Earlier this year, Regina stakeholders launched a campaign to get ready for this step. More at <http://www.infinitehorizons.ca/>

- Calgary is one of many Canadian cities that has struggled during the economic downturn, while Regina continues to boom:
  - While most of the nation has housing starts that are well below pre-recession levels, that is not the case in Regina, where housing starts are above the five- and 10-year averages. (Source: the Conference Board of Canada):
    - Regina housing starts were 930 in 2009
    - Forecasted to be 1,128 in 2010, an increase of 21.3 per cent
    - The forecast for 2011 is 1,262, an increase of 11.87 per cent
  - The City of Regina issued record value building permits for the seventh consecutive year — up 34 per cent to \$458 million. (Source: City of Regina 2009 Annual Report)
  - Regina's economy will grow by three per cent in 2010, Regina's unemployment rate will remain low at about five per cent and the population will grow by one per cent. Retail sales are expected to increase 2.5 per cent following a slight decline in 2009. (Sources: Conference Board of Canada's Metropolitan Outlook, Autumn 2009).
  - The booming economy and a shortage of skilled labour drove wage rates up by an average of 5.7 per cent per year from 2005 to 2009. The

# HelloRegina.ca



**REGINA**  
Infinite Horizons



labour market has loosened quite a bit since then but wages will still grow by nearly five per cent in 2010 to reach the national average for the first time. The growth rates have been highest in construction and the accommodation/food services sectors. (Source: sasktrends.ca)

- Calgary represents a key target city for what Regina has to offer because its residents may be struggling to make ends meet due to the high cost of living:
  - Average price of a home in Regina is \$253,940, Calgary \$385,712 and the national average \$324,924. (Sources: CMHC Housing Market Outlook July 2010; The Canadian Real Estate Association, Aug. 2010)
  - The monthly mortgage payment on the average home in Regina is \$1,533\*; the average home in Calgary is \$1,962 per month. The variance in payment over the life of the mortgage is \$128,700. That is an extra \$128,000 for children's education, starting a business, building a retirement nest egg or whatever infinite horizons you can imagine. (\*Source: RBC on-line mortgage calculator, monthly payments, five-year fixed posted rate 5.39 per cent over 25 year amortization)

- Calgary residents may be "commuter weary", while many Regina residents are able to walk to work because:
  - It is a smaller city. The commute in Regina means no more than a 45-minute drive, but in most cases it takes less than 20 minutes.
  - Regina residents spend an average of 66 minutes on the road, with many suburbanites spending over an hour and a half going to and from work each business day. (Source: StatsCan 2006).

#### Contact Information