



NEWS

Visit Seattle forges new marketing ground with film grant

By [Doug Zanger](#)

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Visit Seattle continues to celebrate the city through branded content

For many years, **Visit Seattle has taken a more unconventional approach to marketing the city** – especially as it relates to creating content. While some tourism organizations may endeavor a more predictable track, Visit Seattle, along with its agency PB&, relies on a broad swath of talented filmmakers to tell the story of The Emerald City.

In the early part of 2017, Visit Seattle and SundanceTV partnered for a unique perspective on **Seattle** at last year's **Sundance Film Festival through their Project Five by Five**, a series that tasked filmmakers to provide their take on the city, guided by one of the five senses.

"No ads, no key messages, just entertainment-based content that unpacks what makes the city special, from different points of view," said Tom Norwalk, chief executive officer of Visit Seattle at the time.

The pivot to letting others tell their story began a couple of years ago – and there was an acknowledgment that a different take was likely a more effective path to explain Seattle's story.

"We don't have to tell our own story, other people can tell it even more beautifully than we could imagine sometimes," says Ali Daniels, senior vice president and chief marketing officer of Visit Seattle. "Some of the filmmakers (from last year's Five by Five project) didn't know a lot about Seattle before. But they did their research, and of course, they find the experiences that all Seattleites have experienced – like riding on a ferryboat for the first time and what that does to your mental state, or parts of town that we haven't highlighted before through some of our films. Beautiful storytellers can tell a beautiful story about anything and give them a product, like Seattle, to talk about and, holy smokes."

To that end, Visit Seattle and PB& are embarking on another expansion of the initial idea. 'Dear Seattle' will continue the spirit of last year's effort – with four of five filmmakers premiering their work at Sundance this week. Unlike last year's work, the films are being created by filmmakers either based in or connected to Seattle. Like previous films, the stars of the show aren't necessarily the predictable icons of the city – like the Space Needle – but the other aspects of Seattle that make it unique.

"We wanted them to write their love letter to the city," says Britt Fero, principal at PB&.

"It's much more intimate," adds Daniels.

Extending the scope of the city, Visit Seattle forged new ground by supporting the Independent Spirit Awards through the creation of the Seattle Story Award, which awards a filmmaker that embodies the spirit of the city.

"One thing that the Spirit Awards embodies is celebrating emerging and independent filmmakers, and there's so much in that DNA that mirrors the spirit of Seattle in supporting emerging artists and supporting creativity in all forms," says Fero. "Rather than just being a sponsor of the awards, we wanted to do something for that community to truly be part of it. We said we'd like to give the Seattle Story Award to an emerging filmmaker who embodies Seattle and continues the long history of creating film that's rich in diversity and innovation that transforms people through the power of stories. That's what we believe this city does itself for anyone who's set foot here."

Through a nomination process that included a long list of candidates, Matty Brown emerged as the winner of the award, which includes a \$25,000 grant to create a short film inspired by Seattle's independent spirit. This film's teaser will premiere during the March 3 broadcast of the Independent Spirit Awards on IFC. Receiving the award at an event hosted by actors Alia Shawkat and John Cho, Brown was surprised by the recognition.

MATTY BROWN wins the Seattle Story Award | 2018 Film Independent Spirit Awa...



"I wasn't expecting to hear my name," he says. "It's the biggest thing in my whole career, and I don't know if people realize how big of an opportunity this is."

Brown, who has called Seattle home for 12 years, has plied his trade mainly in the travel space but branched out to commercial work for brands including Lincoln and Samsung, because it was more in line with the type of filmmaking he was most interested in exploring. This project for Visit Seattle exposes Brown to an entirely new audience and a peer group within Hollywood and shows that brand storytelling can be both informative and beautiful. With Visit Seattle's penchant for being more hands-off on the process, Brown sees ample space to create without limits.

"(Visit Seattle and PB&) came to me and said 'let your mind explode,'" Brown notes. "[They also said] 'Let your imagination just take over [to share] how you feel about your city.'"

Without sharing too much, and working on a tight deadline, Brown is edging his concept through empathy and the eyes of a Native American woman.

"Because we're so rooted in such a natural world here, the only thing I could think in my mind was an old Native woman looking back on her life," he reveals. "What an amazing way to show the city, through the eyes of a person who's seen everything and felt everything here and how culturally and eye-poppingly rich this city and the outlying areas are. I think it's

imperative to be able to tell that story with a creative aspect to it, and we're all excited to show this thing and just bring it to life."

For their part, Visit Seattle and PB& are equally excited to see the work and continue to push the boundaries of what marketing for cities looks like now and into the future, trusting the direction that they have embarked upon and the willingness to keep things open for the talent.

"It's trust, and it's confidence in your product and the partners that you surround yourself with," says Daniels. "The risks that we're taking now are risks that we wouldn't have taken five years ago. So it's making us a bit more comfortable in being without that net."

The Drum, in partnership with Visit Seattle, celebrates Seattle and its creativity as part of our Creative Cities series.

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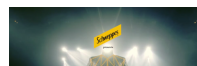
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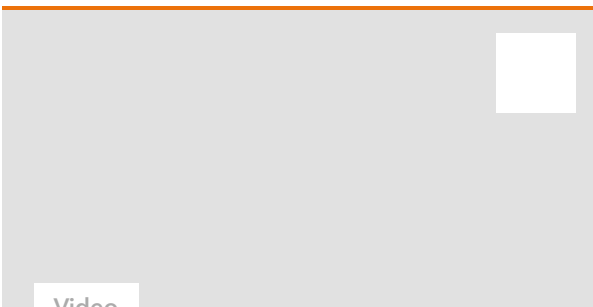
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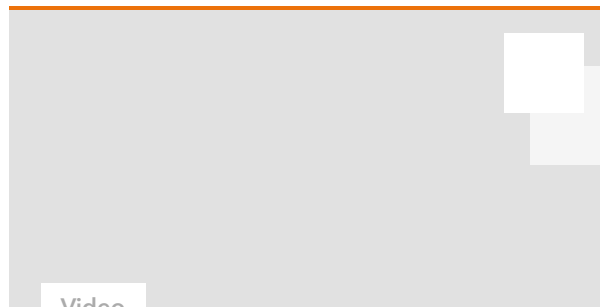
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