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B.C.'s intellectual capital as brand identity; Province can follow Australia's lead in repositioning itself as a world leader in intellectual capacity

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A lot has been said lately about research and development and the role of intellectual capital in our country's development. As a commodity- focused economy, exporting has been a vital part of our history. The same is true for Australia, a country that has made a concerted effort to modify that landscape to reposition itself as a leader when it comes to education and intellectual capital. This is part of its international strategy of brand identity.

Here, we have yet to define our brand identity. GfK Roper ranked Vancouver in 18th position after polling 10,000 people in 20 countries to find out consumers' perceptions about the reputations of 50 cities worldwide. The contradiction, however, is that Vancouver is routinely among the top scorers when it comes to standard and quality of living, and it is firmly situated on the international radar as the host city of the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. And so, the question that keeps coming up is; "Do we only want to be a global city when we win awards and host events or do we want to be one by being a leader on the global issues that affect us today and into tomorrow?"

These spaces, the ones surrounding brand identity and intellectual capital, are areas where not only Vancouver, but the province of British Columbia and the country of Canada, can let their colours shine. They can be filled by home- grown talent in the fields of innovation, research, science and technology, but we've got to step up to the challenge.

The Premier's Technology Council Report concludes that R&D investments in B. C. lag behind the competition in North America. B.C.'s expenditures in R&D fall behind the technology states of Washington, California and Massachusetts when compared as a per cent of GDP. Translated into a real-world application, our ability to compete in the global arena is hampered. We are already playing catch-up.

Academics and start-up technology companies require supportive environments. They've got to be able to effectively link their research to commercialization in the marketplace and, in order to accomplish that, B.C.'s innovators need access to affordable research facilities that enable those connections to flourish.

Research parks do just that. They aid in the transfer of technology and business, and they promote interaction between innovators. I firmly believe research parks have a critical role in strengthening our province's knowledge- based community and that ideas born here can transform into global ones. In fact, Cardiome Pharma Corp., a biotech company that uses office and laboratory space at our Technology Enterprise Facility III building at the University of B. C. campus, recently partnered with Merck & Co. Now, Cardiome -- a Vancouver- based drug development company -- can focus on bringing new discoveries and medicines to patients around the world as a Canadian innovator; a Canadian brand.

Discovery Parks' facilities, located on the campuses of five of the provinces' educational institutions, provide more than just low operating costs and affordable rent. They provide B.C. with commercial research facilities that are environmentally-sustainable. In Burnaby, we've just unveiled the ultimate green building -- Discovery Green -- which adheres to the LEED Gold Standard of green building and development. Discovery Green is poised to be Burnaby's most ecological commercial building, a

legacy piece that will exemplify the provincial commitment to innovative environmental construction and design.

Incorporated into the construction of Discovery Green is denim pine, which finds a use for the thousands of B.C. mountain pines that were otherwise rendered unusable due to their destruction by the pine beetle.

Using less than half the amount of concrete by volume than a conventionally constructed building, this research facility is setting an eco-conscious building and design standard for the future.

In October, Vancouver will make its way onto the global stage for a couple of days (based around an event). The Association of University Research Parks will hold its annual gathering in our great city, providing a forum for the highest level of collaboration among universities, industry and government from around the world. In my opinion, this collision between intellectual capital and our city's identity is precisely what we ought to be harnessing as our brand identity of tomorrow, but also of today.

Bernie Bressler is chairman of Discovery Parks, a private Canadian trust that finances, designs and builds research parks for the benefit of British Columbia.