I interned for North Star Destination Strategies in Nashville, Tennessee. They are one of the very few companies that specialize in community branding. The goal of community branding is to change, refine or improve what people are saying about a community. The process of community branding at North Star entails an in depth research period that is designed to gain as much knowledge as possible about the community they are working with and discover a community's values, assets, and priorities. During this research period, the company reaches out to city councilmen, residents, visitors, and leaders of the community using surveys and phone interviews. The most fun and essential aspect of the research process in my opinion are the In-Market trips that are taken to the client communities. An In-Market trip consists of about two and a half to three days of exploring the community by visiting attractions, learning about and experiencing its most valuable assets, and speaking with community leaders and residents. Afterward, North Star studies the competing cities' or counties' branding and marketing strategies in order to create a brand that will be unique for each client. The findings of this research are put together in a PowerPoint presentation that is called a competitive analysis. After all of the research is done and a brand platform (prospective brand idea for the community) is created, it is presented to leaders and stakeholders of the community. Then North Star moves into the creative process where they begin to work with the client on written concepts and looks and logos. Furthermore, they come up with ideas on how to implement their brand. The final report is then culminated and named by North Star, the community's Brandprint.
What I enjoyed about interning at North Star is that they made it a point to involve the interns in every aspect of the job. I was able to attend all of the company meetings that took place while I was there and I played an active role in the branding process. At North Star I learned to conduct detailed research and analyze community needs based off of their current branding or marketing positions. I was able to gain these skills through a variety of tasks given to me. I also learned how to better communicate in a professional setting and manage my work load as the summer went on. At first I expected to be directed to each tasks or told what to do next, which was the case at first, however it quickly changed after being trained. I would most often be given a variety of projects at the beginning of each week and be expected to complete them in my own timing. Some of the projects had concrete deadlines but most of the time I had to determine on my own, based off of the needs at the office currently, how to prioritize my work. It opened up a healthy freedom for me because unlike in school there weren't too many deadlines. Therefore I was able to contribute my best work because I didn't have to stress about a time limit. As a result of this freedom, we were expected to communicate often in the office due to the fact that the completion of the majority of our projects were dependent upon each other's finished work. This meant giving constant updates to project managers on my progress with projects and establishing possible completion times. So in some instances I was setting my own deadlines.

Unfortunately I was not able to take an In-Market trip so the most enjoyable aspect of the internship for me was making perception calls. North Star conducts a series of phone interviews with residents, visitors and outsiders of the client community during the research period. The
The purpose of the interviews are to gain insight on how, according to the people, the community has branded itself. I enjoy speaking with people so conducting phone interviews was right up my alley. I often spoke with enthusiastic individuals and learned interesting things about the communities and what life is like in certain areas.

I felt that I made a difference at North Star because as an intern I was given tasks and projects that were used in final presentations and reports. Rather than being given busy work, I played an important role in the success of the company. One specific instance in which my work was used was during a debrief presentation of the city Parker, Colorado. The entire PowerPoint, which consisted of insightful information about the city and how they've been branded, was created by me. This was one of the instances in which I was able to witness my work used in a final presentation but it wasn't the only time my work was used.

One of the downfalls of this job for me was that it was very monotonous and all of my time was spent behind a desk looking at a computer screen the majority of the time. I was initially attracted to the job because of the interactive atmosphere and hands-on culture that was advertised. However, the only aspect of the internship that entailed a great deal of interaction were the In-Market trips, which I did not have the opportunity to participate in. Therefore the internship was disappointing in that sense because I felt that I was somewhat mislead to believe that there would be more hands-on involvement. Moreover, I assumed that as apart of this internship I would be able to explore my creative interests and assist in visually branding but I was assigned to the marketing research team and I was only awarded one opportunity to take on some of the creative responsibilities.
Overall, this internship provided me with an improved understanding of where I would like to work in the general field of marketing, advertising and branding. North Star is heavily focused on detailed, in-depth, and insightful research that marketing agencies do not usually provide. Branding is most often the step taken before you begin to market and advertise a product, company or community. Therefore the goal is to study and get to know something so that you can form an identity from what you have learned. It is much less dealing with creativity and does not entail the level of interaction that I greatly desire in a career. So although North Star may not be the place for me, I appreciated the experience and what I have taken from it.