

What are
our regional
tendencies?

Why does
identity matter?

What's in a name?

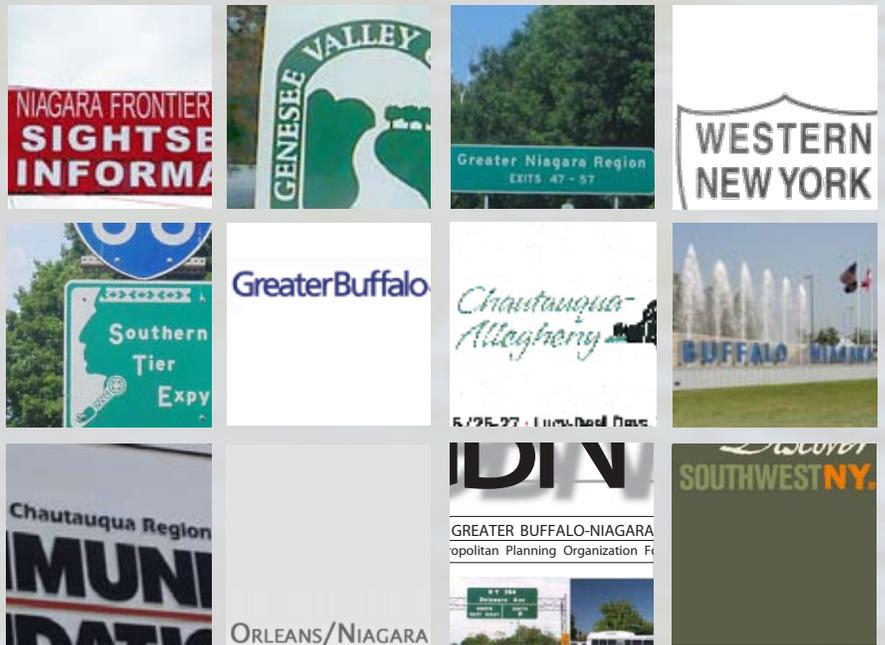
The Regional Name Game

At any given location in Western New York, multiple names compete to describe the same region or sub-region, making the formation of strong regional identities difficult. New names have been tossed into the mix over time, while older ones live on. A look at the contours of regional interactions hint at the complexities that have led to an abundance of names, but they also indicate regional tendencies that may be used to help build strong regional brands.

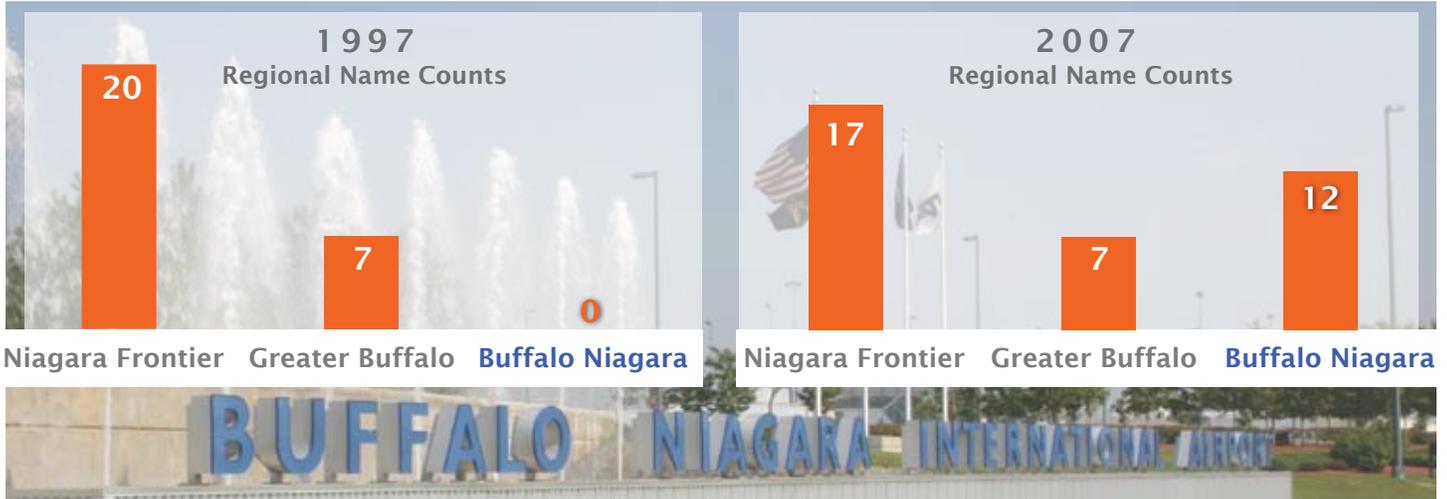
What's in a name?

In almost every regard, regionalism is a more complex idea than it first appears, beginning with the seemingly simple task of defining and naming regions. Flipping through the yellow pages or scanning signage along area highways reveals the variety of names that businesses, institutions, government agencies and residents use to describe all or parts of western New York State. "Buffalo Niagara," "Niagara Frontier," and "Greater Buffalo" all describe areas in Erie and Niagara Counties, and possibly beyond. To the south, "Chautauqua-Allegheny," "Southern Tier" and "Southwest NY" are among the names currently in use, while both "Niagara" and "Genesee" are commonly found in names covering areas in between Buffalo and Rochester.

The more widely applicable "Western New York" competes with these narrower terms, but its boundaries are similarly vague. In addition to the common eight-county definition, many state agencies and other groups have alternative designations for the term.



Use of Regional Names by Businesses & Organizations, 1997 and 2007



Source: Polk City Directories of Buffalo and Suburban Buffalo, count of unique entities using specified names

Over time, new names have sprouted. When “Buffalo Niagara” was added to the title of Buffalo’s airport in 1996, replacing “Greater Buffalo,” a new term was born and has spread. A look at the names of organizations appearing in city directories in 1997 and 2007 shows that, within a decade, “Buffalo Niagara” has become the second most popular of today’s three most commonly used names, indicating the fluidity of regional brands. However, the other names—“Niagara Frontier” and “Greater Buffalo”—are still widely used, contributing to uncertainty regarding proper usage. Whether any of these—or perhaps, other—names apply to the wider binational region is another point of perplexity. The general confusion is perhaps best reflected by the old Niagara Frontier Transportation Committee, which was renamed the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council in 1998, replacing one regional term with a combination of the other two.

What are our regional tendencies?

Most often, regions are defined and named by their location within political boundaries—like “Western New York”—or their proximity to certain geographic features, like mountain ranges or rivers. Socioeconomic features that describe how communities tend to communicate and interact with each other are a more

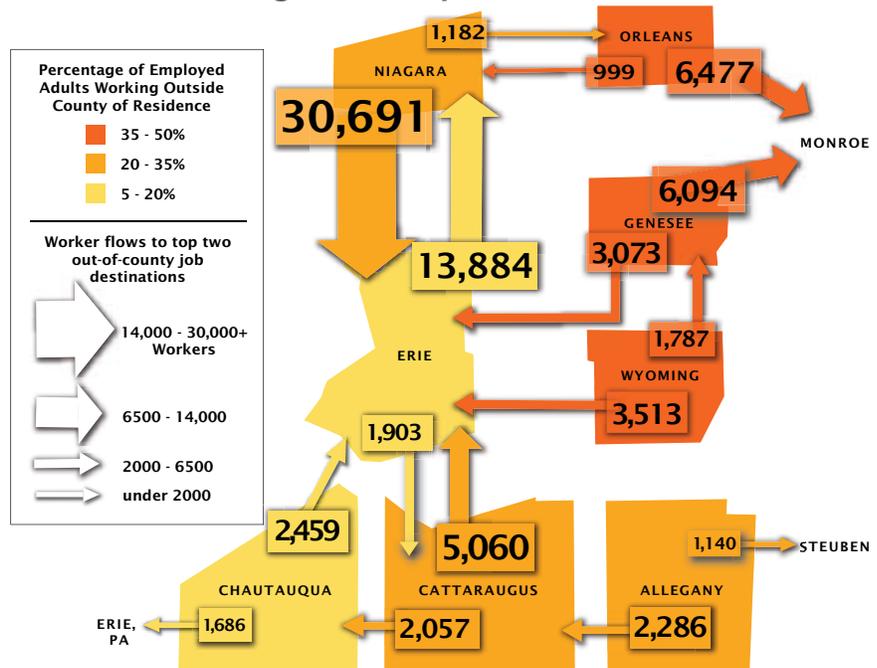
complicated—but often more telling—way to understand and define regions.

Commuting patterns, for example, are a common method for gauging the degree of interaction and interdependence between places. In Western New York, several counties export a large portion of their workers to surrounding counties, especially to communities with much larger employment bases. In Orleans, Genesee and Wyoming Counties, for example, between 35% and 50% of employed adults leave their county of residence when they go to work. Where do they go? Monroe County (Rochester) receives the greatest number

of workers from Orleans; Genesee sends large numbers to both Monroe and Erie Counties—though the former receives twice as many; and Erie County is the main recipient of Wyoming County workers.

Other notable commuter flows include the heavy two-way traffic between Erie and Niagara Counties, with over 30,000 Niagara County residents—or just under one-third of the county’s workforce—traveling daily to jobs in Erie County. In Chautauqua County, the two largest destinations for workers are Erie County, NY, and Erie County, PA.

Commuters Crossing the County Line



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census

Another common way of marking regional boundaries is media consumption. For example, a look at the market penetration of the major metropolitan newspapers of Buffalo, Rochester and Erie, PA, indicates the relative influence of these three cities in different parts of Western New York. The boundaries that define these zones of influence are far from the clean straight lines that form most of the region's political boundaries, hinting at the roots of identity dilemmas. The three northeastern counties, such as their commuting patterns indicate, are unevenly divided between Buffalo and Rochester. Most of Orleans County reads the Rochester *Democrat & Chronicle*,

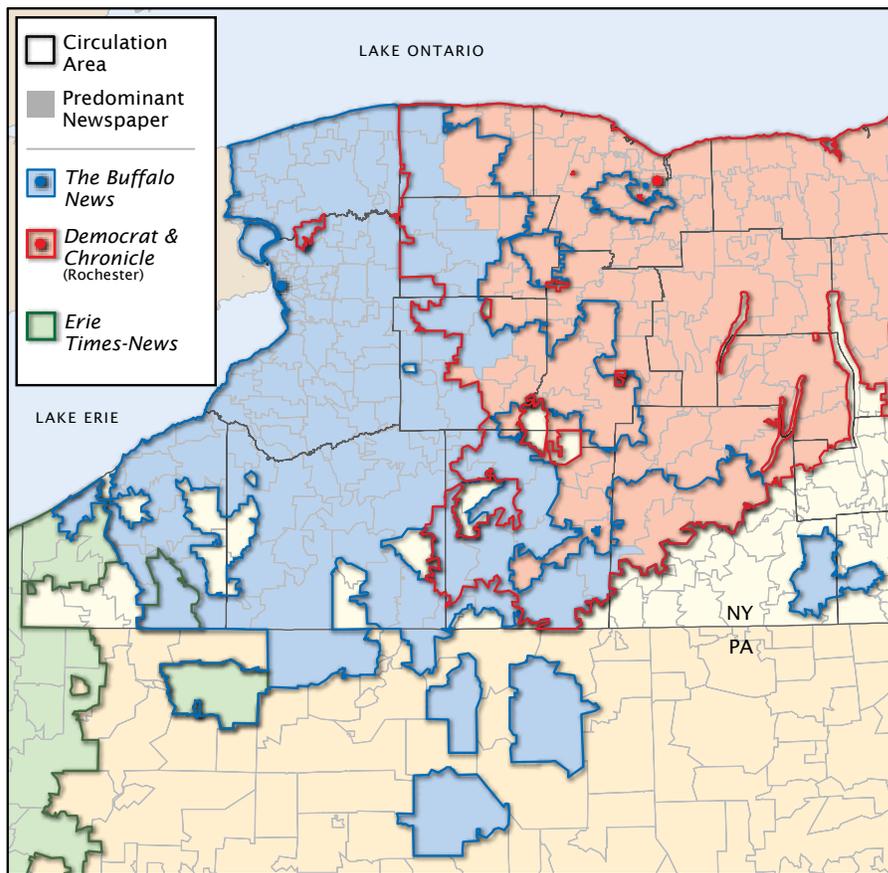
Commuting patterns and media consumption are indicators of regional orientation

Wyoming County leans toward *The Buffalo News* and Genesee County is split half and half. Allegany County

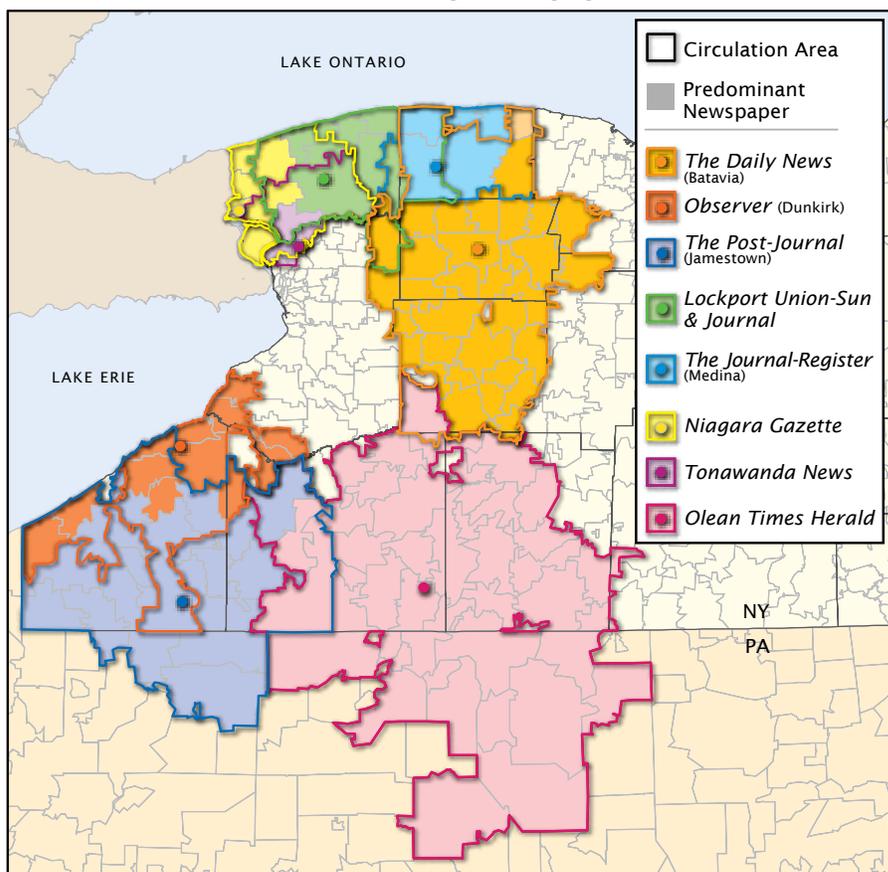
is similarly conflicted, with both the Buffalo and Rochester papers circulating throughout most of the county, while the western end of Chautauqua County pays close attention to events on the other side of the state line by reading the *Erie Times-News*.

At a finer level, the circulation patterns of Western New York's local daily newspapers also hint at community affinities that transcend political boundaries and provide some definition to the area's numerous sub-regions. In Chautauqua County, the split between *The Post-Journal* in Jamestown and the *Observer* in Dunkirk generally matches the county's topographical split between the flat coastal areas along Lake Erie and the hilly interior—a case where geographic and social features align. The size of a city's hinterland also matters. The *Olean Times Herald* and *The Daily News* in Batavia cover wide areas, filling newspaper vacuums in rural swaths, while the three papers in Niagara County have very localized markets, owing to their close proximity.

Market Penetration of Metropolitan Daily Newspapers in WNY



Market Penetration of Local Daily Newspapers in WNY



Sources: Audit Bureau of Circulation 2005 zip code data, compiled in "Newsroom Diversity Index, (2005)", a report by the Knight Foundation



Why does identity matter?

The difficulties embedded in questions of regional identity stem, in part, from two underlying conditions. One is the presence of conflicting desires for group membership and the preservation of individual character. The other is the inclination to view regions almost entirely through political and geographic lenses, which can distort human-level interactions—such as commuting and media consumption—that indicate more natural regional tendencies.

Despite these complications, forming a strong regional identity is an important ingredient for successfully competing in the global economy and promoting regional cohesion. Achieving a global visibility that rises above others and attracts the attention of investors and visitors requires a consistent and compelling regional brand. Sub-regional brands also play important roles in differentiating and marketing parts of a region, but they, as well, must be consistent to be memorable and effective.

Reconciling the importance of creating strong regional identities with the inherent difficulties is a process fraught with tricky questions, not the least of which are “Who gets to name?” and “Where does the name apply?” As is demonstrated by the fast adoption of “Buffalo Niagara” over the past decade, the marketplace of names may be the best place to look for signals indicating a strong and rising regional brand that is widely acceptable. Government agencies at the state and regional levels, both a reflection and a major source of naming confusion, can act on those signals by adopting consistent names and boundaries for entire agencies and administrative divisions.

At the same time, patterns of regional interaction should be heeded in order to better understand and acknowledge the limits of a regional brand. Such patterns suggest that Orleans and Genesee counties are more firmly aligned with Rochester than Buffalo, which is reinforced by their participation—along with Wyoming County—in Rochester-based planning initiatives. Consequently, efforts to include those counties in a Buffalo-centric brand are unlikely to succeed, unless that brand broadens to encompass a wider area including Rochester and Southern Ontario. The term “Golden Horseshoe” has been used to describe a Toronto-Buffalo-Rochester region, but whether this designation is artificial or descriptive of real regional tendencies remains unclear.

Regional Institute Policy Briefs provide key data and analysis to frame issues, inform decisions and guide policy action.

©2007 The Regional Institute



The Regional Institute
University at Buffalo
The State University of New York
Beck Hall
Buffalo, NY 14214-8010
Phone: 716 829-3777 Fax: 716 829-3776
Web: regional-institute.buffalo.edu
E-mail: regional-institute@buffalo.edu