

Assessment Findings and Suggestions Report

Marion County, Iowa

ROGER BROOKS >
International





Community Assessment

INTRODUCTION

In June of 2013, a Community Assessment of Marion County was conducted, and the findings were presented in a two-and-a-half hour workshop. The assessment provides an unbiased overview of the Marion County area - how it is seen by a visitor. It includes a review of local marketing efforts, signage, attractions, critical mass, retail mix, ease of getting around, customer service, visitor amenities such as parking and public washrooms, overall appeal, and the community's ability to attract overnight visitors.

In performing the Community Assessment, we looked at the area through the eyes of a first-time visitor. No prior research was facilitated, and no community representatives were contacted except to set up the project. The towns and surrounding area were "secretly shopped." Any person looking to relocate their business, industry, or residence will come to your community as a visitor first. Tourism is the front door to all your economic development efforts.

Once potential visitors find information about your area, are the marketing materials good enough to close the sale? In the Marketing Assessment, we reviewed your visitor website and print marketing materials.

A typical community has five opportunities to close the sale:

- 1) Personal contact (visitor information centers, trade shows, etc.)

- 2) Websites
- 3) Brochures and printed materials
- 4) Publicity (articles)
- 5) Word of mouth - the most effective means

We searched the Internet for activities, requested and reviewed printed materials, and looked for articles and third-party information. As we prepared for travel to your community, we searched both commercial and organizational websites promoting the area, tourism websites, and read travel articles and guidebooks.

The marketing assessment determined how effective the marketing was in convincing a potential visitor that the area would be worth a special trip, a stop, or an overnight stay. The key to the marketing assessment is to see if you have a primary lure that makes you worth a special trip of a two-hour drive - or from further away. The question on most visitors' minds is: What do you have that I can't get closer to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

Where most communities falter is when they merely provide "lists" of what the community has, whether it's truly "unique" or not. Nearly every community in North America promotes the usual list of diversions: local museums, shops and restaurants, plenty of lodging, golf, outdoor recreation, historic downtowns, scenic vistas, etc. Of course, nearly every visitor can do these things closer to home. So, what makes Marion County worth the trip?

Always promote your primary lure first - what makes you worth that special trip. THEN, promote your diversionary, or "complementary" activities.

Would you go to Anaheim, California, if Disneyland wasn't there? Do you think that Universal Studios and Knotts Berry Farm mind that Disneyland gets all the glory? Of course not. Eighty percent of all tourism spending is with those secondary activities. Disney does the heavy lifting in terms of advertising and promotion, and the diversionary activities benefit as well.

In a nutshell, the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment looks for what makes your community worth a special trip, or a great place to live, or to do business. We look for specifics and details. Do you give a reason for visiting, and do you provide enough information to make it easy to plan a trip? Are the marketing materials good enough to close the sale?

The second part of the assessment process is the On-site Assessment. During this part of the assessment, we spent several days in the area, looking at enticements from the highways (signs, billboards, something that would get a visitor to stop), beautification and overall curb appeal, wayfinding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public washrooms, visitor information, parking), activities, overall appeal, retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass, customer service, area attractions, pedestrian friendliness, gathering spaces, evening activities, and the availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The area benefits from tourism when visitors spend money, and they do that in the local gift shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. Therefore, the On-

site Assessment includes a candid look at private businesses as much as public spaces and amenities.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we provide a low-cost "suggestion," where possible, on how the challenge can be corrected or overcome. The suggestions are not termed "recommendations," as they were developed without consulting the communities first about possible constraints, future plans, or reasons why the suggestions may not be appropriate. Hopefully this assessment process will open dialogue within the communities, leading them to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

It's important to note that to increase the area's tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions may have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all, can have a profoundly successful impact on the area's ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be a region-wide effort, involving both privately owned businesses as well as local, county, and state agencies, where appropriate. Every local organization plays a role in tourism, downtown revitalization, or economic development efforts. A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO, CVB, Chamber, TPA, etc.) will not be successful if the tourism effort is not region-wide.

In many cases, issues may come up that you are already aware of and are already working on. In that case, the assessment validates those efforts. But more often than not, the assessment will point



out things that you are aware of but can't mention or bring up without paying a political price. Local politics can be a killer of the tourism industry.

While marketing efforts are important, product development is the most important factor of a successful tourism industry. Visitors want activities, not just things to look at. How much time can a visitor spend enjoying activities - that cater to their interests - in your area? Do your communities have truly unique attractions the visitor can't get closer to home? You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises - otherwise visitors might come once, but they won't come back. It's much more cost effective to bring people back, than to always go out and entice new visitors into town. "Been there, done that" communities eventually run out of visitors and find they don't have a sustainable tourism industry, or they simply become pit stops or gateways on the way to somewhere else.

After spending several days reviewing marketing materials and assessing the communities, we have looked at all of these issues, and have developed some suggestions and ideas the communities can discuss and possibly implement to help increase tourism spending locally.

SUCCESSFUL TOURISM TRANSLATES TO CASH

Tourism is successful when the community imports more cash than it exports. When residents spend their hard-earned money outside the community, the community is exporting cash - often referred to as "leakage." Tourism helps fill that gap, importing cash into the local economy without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services. Visitors come, spend

money, then go home. When you import more cash than you export, you have a positive "balance of trade." Communities with successful tourism programs easily see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas other communities find that they subsidize visitors - providing services visitors use without them leaving enough money behind to cover the cost of those services.

The primary goal of the tourism industry is to bring more cash into the local economy. This doesn't happen when visitors come into the community, get out of their cars, and take photographs. And it doesn't happen when visitors go swimming in the lake at your park all day, sunning, and eating the lunch they brought from home. And it doesn't happen when visitors hike down your trails, enjoy your interpretive centers, or stroll through your lovely arboretums. These are all great things to do, and, of course, you do want your visitors to do these - but, you also want to entice them into your shops, your cafes, espresso stands, restaurants, galleries, B&B's, and hotels, ultimately opening their wallets to make purchases. That is what helps your local economy, your small merchants, your hoteliers, and your tax coffers.

To entice visitors to spend money in your community, you need to have places for them to spend it - you need to have the right mix of shops, restaurants, entertainment, and lodging facilities, all in an attractive setting, as well as attractions that make them want to visit you in the first place.



THE THREE TYPES OF TOURISM

1. Visiting friends and family

The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and/or family. If you did nothing to promote tourism, you would still have tourism in your community. However, when friends and family come to visit, do your residents take them out to eat, shop, dine locally? Or do they head to a neighboring community? Do your locals even know what you have to offer? An effective tourism marketing effort also includes educating locals as to what you have and how to find it through effective wayfinding signage, gateways and advertising.

2. Business travel

The second most popular reason for travel is business. Included in this category is educational travel: colleges and universities, as well as conventions and meetings, corporate travel, vendor travel, etc. Like leisure travelers, this group is looking for things to do “after hours” while in the area. The most successful convention and trade show towns are the result of their secondary activities or “diversions,” not simply because of their convention and exhibition facilities. Think Disneyworld, Disneyland, San Antonio’s River Walk, Banff, to name a few.

3. Leisure travel

The third, and most lucrative of all types of visitors, is the leisure traveler. They have no personal connections to the community, but are coming purely to enjoy themselves. They stay in commercial lodging establishments, eat virtually all their meals in local restaurants, and their top diversionary

activity is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting.

The average leisure visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet typically only spends four to six hours with the primary lure. They then spend eight to ten hours with diversionary activities - things they could do closer to home, but will do while in the area. A good example of this is Branson, Missouri, the “live music-theater capital of the world.” This town of 6,500 residents hosts 7.5 million visitors a year. The primary “lure” is the 49 music theaters. The average visitor attends two shows a day over about four hours. During the other hours of the day, the visitor will shop in local outlet malls, head to the water parks, theme parks, and other attractions, play a round of golf, hike, bike, fish, do some bird





watching, and participate in any number of other activities they could do closer to home, but will do while visiting Branson.

THE THREE STAGES OF TOURISM

1. Status quo

If you take no action to develop the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, simply because some travelers will pull off local highways or freeways for gas, food, or lodging, as well as the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have some tourism.

2. Getting people to stop

The first priority of developing a successful tourism industry is getting people to stop. Imagine how successful businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community – buying gas, an ice cream cone, a sandwich, a gift or souvenir?

If there's a strong pull, imagine the money spent if visitors stayed two hours in the community, which nearly always translates to additional spending.

The first goal is to get those travelers to stop.

3. Becoming the destination

To become a destination community you must have attractions and supporting amenities that convince visitors to spend the night. And those attractions must be different from what the visitor can get closer to home.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of

day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors using your community as a pit stop on the way to somewhere else.

THE FOUR-TIMES RULE

Visitors will make a point of stopping or staying in a community if it has enough activities that appeal specifically to them and will keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes) If a visitor has to drive an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

The more you have to offer, collectively, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay, and of course, the more they will spend. This is why it is so important for communities to market more than just their immediate geographic areas. By marketing neighboring activities and attractions, you present much more for a visitor to do, and you make the visit worth the trip.

Visitors don't care about city limits or county lines – so market the broader package and you'll be able to keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some more shopping, and hopefully, an overnight stay.

SELL THE EXPERIENCE, NOT GEOGRAPHY

Nearly every destination marketing organization is charged with promoting a geographic area, yet visitors couldn't care less about those boundaries. They are looking for activities that cater to their

interests, and location is second to the experience. ALWAYS promote the primary lure first, then the location. If I want to go see Jann Arden, I don't care whether she's performing in Ontario or Alberta. People by the millions head to Disneyland, Disneyworld, Dollywood and other attractions. They are not going to Anaheim, Orlando or Pigeon Forge.

Always sell the activity - the experience - THEN the location.

LURES, DIVERSIONS AND AMBIANCE

Too often communities promote the list of diversions that nearly every community has. The primary lure is the activity that a visitor can't find closer to home.

Always promote your primary lure, then the diversions. Do not try to be all things to all people. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had "something for everyone?" Of course not - you go there because they have something specific for you. Find your niche and promote it like crazy.

Historic downtowns provide ambiance - they are not attractions, diversions, nor are they a primary lure. It's what's in the buildings that makes a downtown a destination.

The same can be said for scenery. Unless your vista is a world-class scene, such as Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon, scenic vistas create wonderful ambiance, but don't translate to spending, and they only last a few minutes. Then what?

All too often communities promote their heritage as a primary draw. How far would you travel to visit a mining museum? A timber museum? An

agricultural center? A county historical museum? Heritage must be outstanding and pervasive throughout the community to be a primary lure, such as Plimoth Plantation or Salem, Massachusetts.

Thousands of communities are the "capital" of something. For instance, in California, Borrego Springs is the grapefruit capital of the world. Gilroy is the garlic capital. Modesto is the tomato capital. Gridley is the kiwi capital. Oxnard is the strawberry capital. Fallbrook is the avocado capital. But here's the question: Have you ever gone anywhere because it was the capital of a fruit or vegetable?

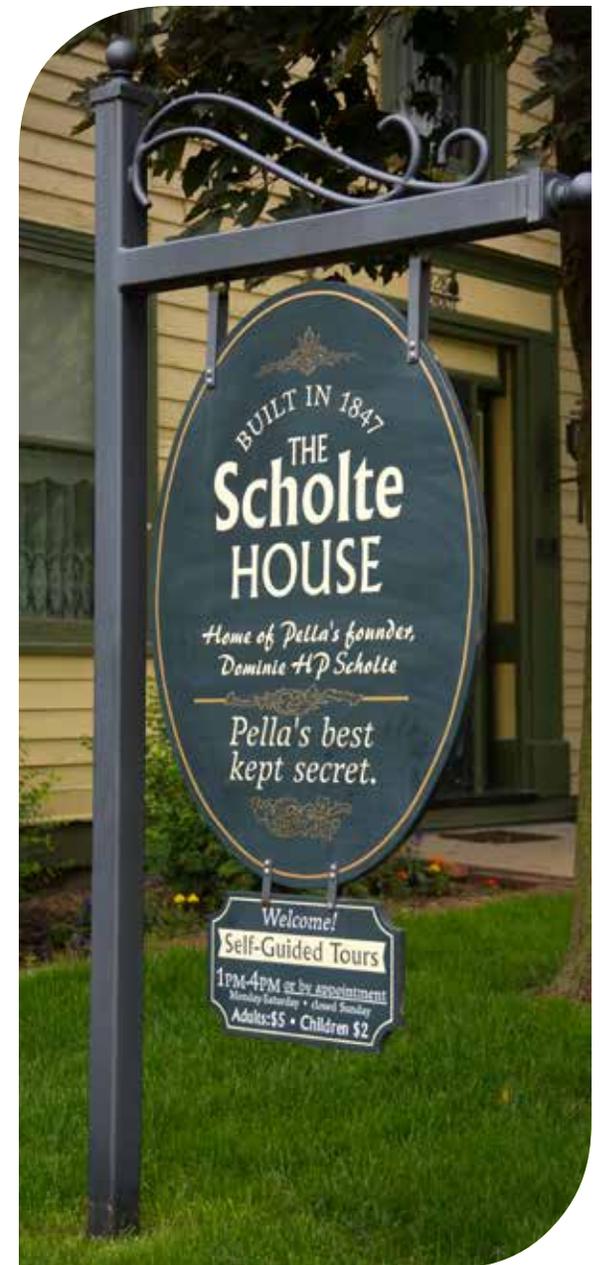
Your local heritage is important to the community and can set the ambiance, even becoming a diversionary activity. For local heritage to be a major attraction, it needs to combine activities with ambiance, and it needs to be pervasive throughout the area.

BE DIFFERENT OR THE BEST

Why should a visitor come to your community if they can enjoy the same activities closer to home? Too many communities promote "outdoor recreation" as their primary draw. Unfortunately, that is the same attraction promoted by nearly every community in North America.

If you are different, then you have a reason for travelers to choose to visit you. If you are the best, then visitors will generally flock to your doors.

If you have great hiking trails, then market their unique qualities. Be specific and paint the image of how wonderful they are in the minds of your potential visitors. If you have one fantastic





restaurant in town, let people know about it – a unique dining experience is something many people will travel far to enjoy.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, began its Shakespeare Festival, which now runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. The Shakespeare Festival made Ashland different from any other community.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and produces dozens of Bavarian events every year. Some now say the town looks more genuinely Bavarian than towns in Bavaria. It is now one of the primary tourist destinations in Washington state, hosting more than 2.5 million visitors annually. They offer a different experience, an experience that is pervasive throughout town.



Okanogan County, Washington is an outdoor recreational paradise – just like 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guidebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising efforts. Like, “Pinch yourself, you’re in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent.” This, and other quotes like it, make it worth the drive to visit Okanogan Country. The third-party endorsements show that they are the best.

Set yourself apart from everyone else, and you’ll see that in being unique, you’ll become a greater attraction.

CRITICAL MASS MEANS CASH

Although it may not be the primary reason why visitors come to your community, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity of visitors. Besides lodging, it is also how visitors spend the most amount of money.

Do you have a pedestrian-friendly shopping district? If not, can you create one? Many communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian “village” including visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information, washrooms, etc., all in an attractive, landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb in those two or three blocks (not spread out all over town) is 10+10+10: Ten destination retail shops, which includes galleries, antiques, collectibles, home accents and furnishings, artists in action, book stores, logo gear (clothing), souvenirs, outfitters, tour operators, activity shops such as kites, jewelry, wine or tobacco shops, and other specialties. The second ten is for food: ice cream, fudge and candy stores, soda fountains, sit-down dining, coffee shops, cafes, bistros, delis, etc. And the final ten are businesses open after 6:00 pm. This includes entertainment: bars, dance clubs, theaters (movies and performing arts), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop), etc.

The important point is to group these businesses together to create the “critical mass” in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will attract visitors as well as locals, and make it worth their while to stop and shop. People are always drawn to the critical mass –

the opportunity to have multiple choices, multiple experiences, all in a convenient and attractive setting.

TOURISM IS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The goal of successful tourism is for people to come into the community, spend money, and go home. Tourism is an \$854 billion dollar industry in the U.S., over \$81 billion in Canada, and supports millions of jobs. Ninety percent of tourism industry businesses are small businesses of which 90% have less than 15 employees. Tourism provides the opportunity for entrepreneurs to get started, for small family-run businesses to thrive, for artisans and craftspeople to find a market, and creates a basis for unique niche-retail environment including wineries, artists, crafts, etc. Tourism provides a diverse market within the community, expanding its potential. Enhancing the community through beautification efforts creates an attractive setting for both locals and visitors, key in revitalizing a community's downtown. And a tourism-friendly town will attract non-tourism industries faster than others – new businesses will see the community as a visitor before they make a final determination about the community. Tourism is the front door to your economic development efforts.

The benefits of a healthy tourism industry can rejuvenate a town, foster community pride, encourage economic diversity, and lead the way to a vital, successful community.



NEXT STEPS

The findings and suggestions in this report will provide many ideas, strategies, and goals to reach for. We hope that it fosters dialogue in the communities and becomes a springboard for the communities in enhancing their tourism industry, leading to greater prosperity, rejuvenation, and enjoyment by all the citizens.

This report offers a first step in reaching that goal. To fully realize the benefits of this assessment, the communities should take these findings and suggestions, discuss them and evaluate them, and develop a plan for implementation.

A detailed branding plan can build on the results of this assessment, adding in-depth research, evaluation, and local input to develop a unique brand and implementation program. The assessment process essentially provides a look at where you are today. Our branding program can help build your branding plan from the ground up - with local input, brainstorming, research, and creative planning. We work with you to guide you through the process, helping create a plan that has local champions and community buy-in.

The next step in the planning process would be to provide public outreach, and review past and current planning efforts. This would determine your goals as a region.

The third step involves research, feasibility and market analysis, and determining your brand - what you are or hope to be known for.

Then comes the “development” portion of the plan or the “how to get there” program: determining

what product development initiatives need to be undertaken to reinforce and grow the brand. This also includes defining the roles of the various local organizations. Brand-building takes a village - everyone pulling in the same direction, each with its own “to do list.”

Finally, there’s the detailed marketing plan: how and when you will tell the world who you are and what makes you special: the place to live, work and play.

This branding plan should be an “action plan” as opposed to a “strategic plan.” You want a to do list, by organization, not just general strategies, goals and objectives.

The recommendations should provide all the necessary steps for your area to be successful in attaining its goals of a more diverse economy with an enhanced tourism industry and to become more attractive and enjoyable for both visitors and citizens.

A good plan will provide a program to get local residents and the business community pulling together to enhance the communities, building their unique images in the minds of visitors and residents alike. The result of your efforts will be a prosperous, enjoyable environment in which to live, work, and visit.



Findings & Suggestions





Tourism is one of the world's largest industries, and it is now one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. International tourist arrivals grew by nearly 4% in 2011 to a whopping 983 million. The business volume of tourism worldwide equals or surpasses oil exports, food products, or automobiles.

Travel in the US is a \$854 billion industry, and its benefits to communities are far-reaching: business income, wage earnings, share earnings, taxes and levies. Direct spending by visitors leads to growth in transportation, construction, agriculture, and retailing, as well as fostering new opportunities for small

business entrepreneurship. Tourism can stimulate construction of new infrastructure, community facilities, retail, dining and entertainment options, sporting facilities, and more - increasing the quality of life for the community.

In addition, tourism can prompt conservation of cultural heritage, increase community pride, and broaden community outlook. Proper planning for tourism development can integrate an economically and environmentally sustainable industry that benefits the community far into the future.



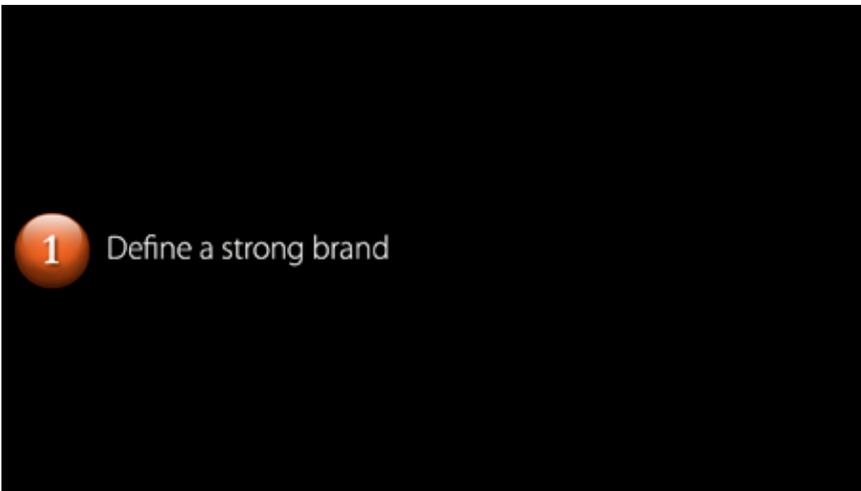
There are about 19,500 cities and towns in the United States and of those only 1,000 have populations of more than 40,000 residents. Iowa is home to 900 cities and towns of which 97% have populations of less than 40,000 people. As many cities and towns lose their primary industries, such as fishing, mining, agriculture, timber, or manufacturing, they are increasingly motivated to diversify into tourism. Competition is fierce for the tourism dollar.

Tourism is the purest form of economic development - people come, spend money, then go home. Even corporate site selectors come first as a visitor.

The primary goal of tourism development is to increase the amount of cash that is "imported" into the community. Fortunately, many of the same ingredients that make a destination attractive to visitors, also make the community attractive to residents and new business development - and investment - making it a better place to live, work, and play.

Tourism is the front door to your non-economic development efforts as well.

Big mistake: cutting tourism and economic development spending in tough times.



City	Jefferson, Texas
Population	2,500
Brand	Antique Capital of Texas
Foundation	125 antique dealers
Results	Now the B&B Capital of Texas

One of the biggest mistakes a community can make is to cut tourism and economic development spending during tough economic times. That's like throwing away your ladder when you're trying to climb out of a hole.

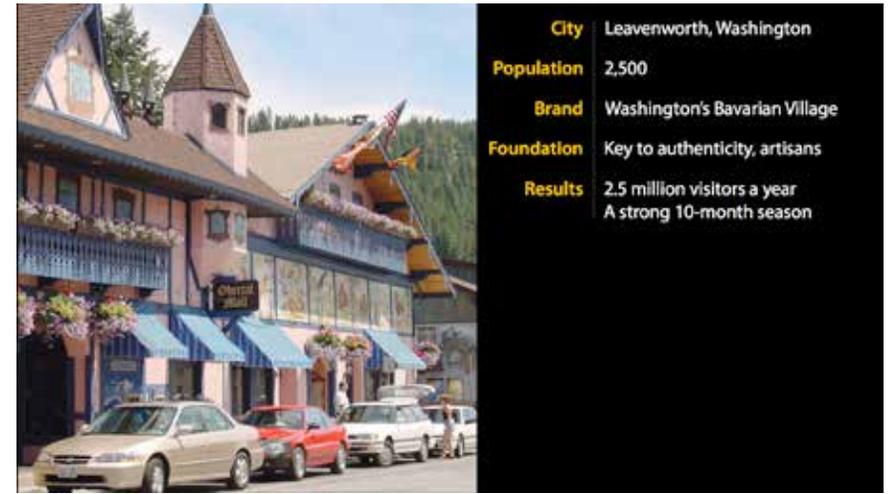
During the assessment, we review sixty different elements in the county.

Marion County has the potential - the foundation - to have a \$150 million tourism industry. This Assessment report includes 30 "to-do" items and if you implement these suggestions you will see your tourism spending more than triple. You have an incredible foundation on which to build, and there is no

reason why you can't see your visitor spending increase - county wide - to \$15 million a year.

1. Start by defining a strong brand. A brand is focusing on what sets you apart from everyone else; it's what makes you *truly* unique. The most successful destinations have a defined community brand.

For example, Jefferson, Texas, with 125 antique dealers - one for every 20 residents - has become the antique capital of Texas, attracting crowds from hundreds of miles away to shop and stay at their B&Bs (bottom right).



Jackson, Wyoming (top left) is another good example. It is home to 110 galleries and western living shops, attracting nearly four million visitors a year. They have defined their focus, and they have encouraged the growth of “like” businesses. The more you have to offer, the further people will come, and the longer they will stay.

Leavenworth, Washington (top right) was once a dying timber town. Beginning with just a couple enterprising residents, they slowly transformed their town into a Bavarian village. It is as authentic as any town in Bavaria, and

today 40% of the residents are from Bavaria! The town has only two shoulder-season months - May and November - and has become one of the most visited small towns in the Northwestern states. There is no reason why Pella, with its Dutch theme, can't be as popular as Leavenworth.

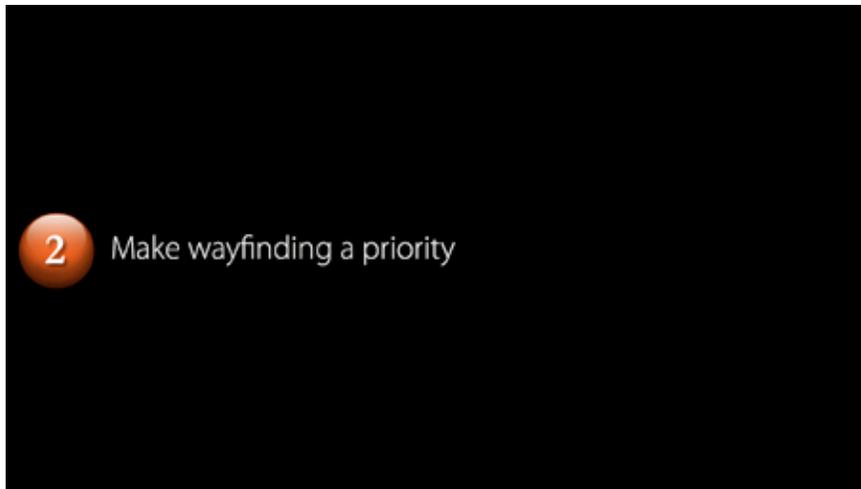
Pella has done an outstanding job with its architectural theme and building requirements - now you need to recruit more Dutch-oriented businesses and bring downtown to life. Every event should heavily portray the Dutch theme.



Knoxville, like Pella, also has tremendous potential if you can leverage the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame and Museum. While its 34 event-days don't create enough year round traffic to sustain retailers, restaurants and other downtown development projects, it could be leveraged into a brand that, perhaps, focuses on all kinds of wheeled sports. Imagine having a BMX track in Knoxville. Motocross events. Car shows. Motorcycle shows. Rallies and classic car shows and other types of "wheeled" sport events and showcases. Some of the best branded cities leverage their "anchor tenants" - think Orlando or

Anaheim where Universal Studios, Wild Kingdom and many other attractions have leveraged Disney's parks - expanding the brand to other events and attractions, making the city a year round draw. Roger was impressed with the museum and spent several hours watching videos, looking at the sprint cars and learning about the sport.

The key is to create activities - things to do, not just things to look at - that will bring visitors into the community approximately 30 weeks of the year, starting with weekends.



There are 172 attractions in the Orlando area: Discovery Cove, Universal Studios, Animal Kingdom, Cirque du Soleil, Typhoon Lagoon, Sea World, Blizzard Beach, Pirates League, Gatorland, Hollywood Studios, and Pirate's Cove. If you had 30 event-weeks, you'd be the year round destination of choice. Think Corvette rallies, Harley Owners Group shows, Mustang rallies, etc.

This could even include water-related sports such as sailing, water skiing, fishing derbies, Hobie Cat racing, etc.

2. Make wayfinding a priority.

Wayfinding not only educates visitors about what you have and where it's located, but will also educate your front-line employees about what you have and where attractions and amenities are located. The easier you make it for visitors, the more likely they are to spend additional time in the community and, as a result, spending will increase.

Wayfinding should be decorative to fit your brand, like Appleton, Wisconsin's system (bottom right).



Oak Harbor, Washington (top left) uses two different, but complementary, sign styles: blue for community services, and gray for visitor attractions and amenities.

Developing a wayfinding system is an investment, not an expense, and it should be a priority. It should include:

- Vehicular wayfinding signage
- Pedestrian wayfinding
- Pole banners, by district, often by season
- Visitor and downtown information

• Gateways and entry points

Some other good examples include Modesto, CA (top right), The Woodlands, Texas (bottom left). Solvang, California (top right) provides visitor information on large monument signs at their well-marked and easy-to-find public parking, making it easy for visitors to find what they are looking for as soon as they get out of their cars.

Hire professionals to create the wayfinding system. It is a science as much as an art. This should be a very top priority for Marion County.



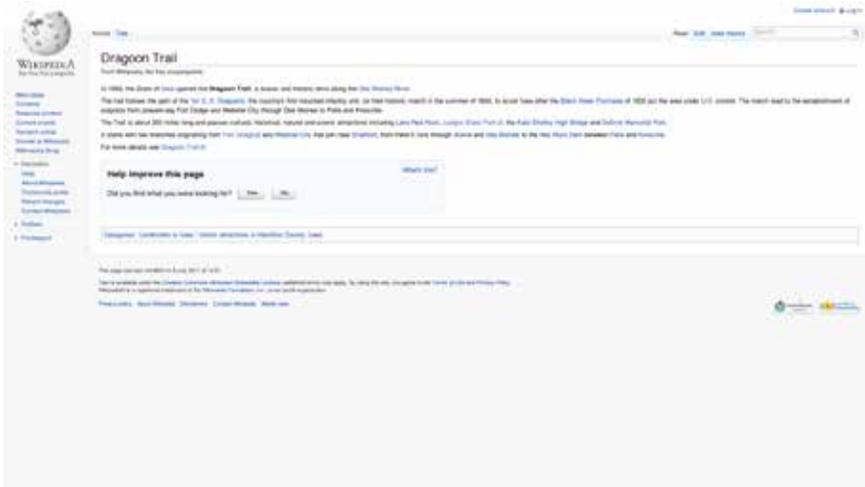
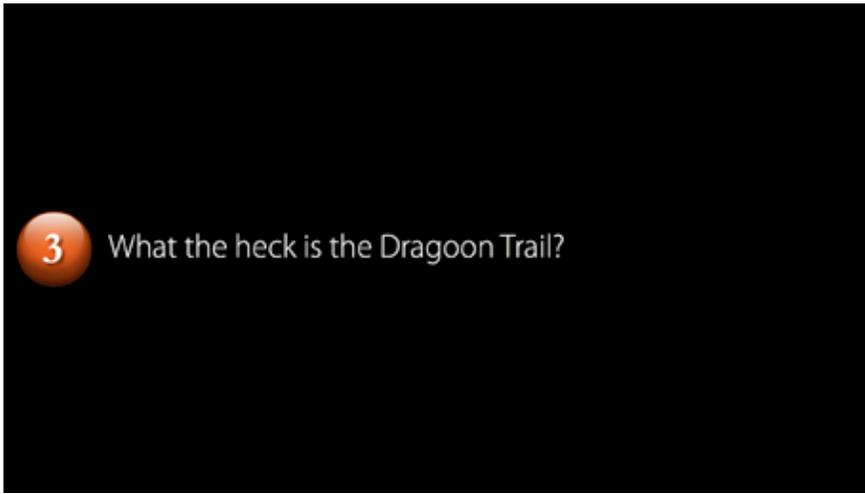
People can read only five items posted on a sign while they are driving (even fewer depending on their speed). So, the sign (top left), would require drivers to stop in the street to read all the choices.

The county should develop and implement a wayfinding system plan with the communities as partners to address:

- Gateways & entries
- Attractions
- Amenities
- Billboards and marketing displays

There is a video available with the All Access Pass to Roger's video library that can walk you through the process of developing a wayfinding system including costs, timelines, how to find the right company to assist with the effort, etc.

Remember: For vehicular traffic, you should never include more than five items on one sign. The wayfinding in downtown Pella (top left) is excellent, but is suited to visitors on foot rather than in vehicles. Also, navigation systems are no substitute for a wayfinding system. These are used to find places we already know exist. Wayfinding also tells us what you have to offer and how to find it.



Seeing the signs for the Dragoon Trail was confusing - I didn't know what it was. I figured there was an interesting story here - but where could I find it?

What to do? Here are a few choices:

- Add something about the Dragoon Trail to your visitor guides, explaining it.
- Include info at lakeside interpretive centers.
- Educate locals at visitor information centers.
- Remove the signs and instead offer maps of the trail.

My suggestion: Have them removed. The "alternate" versus "south" and "north" just added to the confusion. By removing them you eliminate sign clutter and lack of maintenance. Visitors with an interest in following the Dragoon Trail could certainly download a map or even purchase a smart-phone app that can guide them along the trail actually telling the stories of the Trail as they follow the route. This is a perfect example of where technology can be used to create a great experience without adding to confusing and poorly maintained sign clutter.

4 Put your gateway signs where you'll make the best first impression

Sets an increased perceived value
 Creates pride of ownership
 Gets your attention
 Says something about the community
 Sells the real estate faster
 At an increased value
 All these reasons apply to communities.



Gateways into a city, town, downtown district or an attraction provide a sense of arrival and increase the perceived value of the destination. They can turn a district into a destination in its own right.

Gateways should always be placed where you will make the first, best impression. Rarely is that at the city or town limits. When visitors see your gateway signs, they immediately assume they've arrived, and they judge your community by what they see around the signs. If the surroundings are unsightly, they'll judge your community in that light too.

The Pleasantville welcome sign (bottom left) is not in a good location, and actually gives a poor impression of the community. In fact, the first impression is hardly one of a "pleasant" place where "the name says it all."

What to do:

- Move the sign to a better location
- Repaint the sign every couple of years
- Use the readerboard! Any events coming up? Anything special happening?



In the case of Knoxville, the gateway sign (previous page) is nice and the setting is nice. But the challenge: As you come into town (top left) what's your first impression?

Another gateway (top right) says welcome to Knoxville and then note where it's located - next to a cemetery. While beautifully maintained, it's still not an introduction to a vibrant, active community. While it may be unfair, visitors do judge the book by the cover so look carefully at your gateway locations.

What to do:

- Look for good first impression spots
- Work with auxiliary organizations on putting up new signs
- Make sure your gateway signs fit your brand

"You have one chance to make a good first impression." Where you have existing signs add to them: "Downtown Knoxville - 1/2 mile." Doing this essentially says, "Don't judge us yet, you still have half a mile to go!"



What to do:

Work with your neighbors in key locations to make sure they are portraying a good image of the community. Think like a real estate agent where they preach the power of curb appeal.

- Add better signage telling visitors where to go :-)
- Add signage at the marina
- Provide a QR code with the information, rates, website

When I visited the marina I had no clue where you could find the boat rentals, and the one place that looked like it might be the office was closed the entire time I was visiting the area. There were no hours posted, no way to get any information - a lost opportunity (bottom two photos).

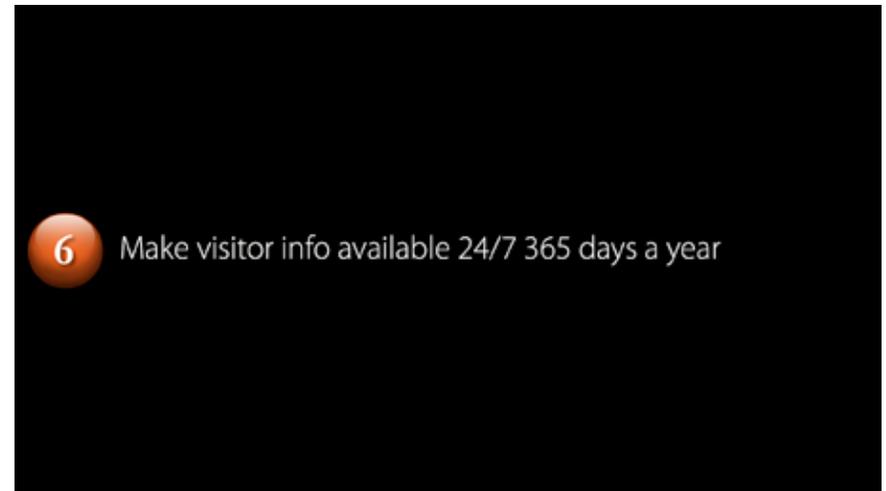
Even local restaurants and businesses need to look at their first impressions. Fact: 70% of first time sales at restaurants come from curb appeal.



The examples shown on this page all have terrific curb appeal. Central College “looks” like an outstanding institution. The Scholte House “looks” like a terrific museum to visit. The courthouse in Knoxville is beautiful and the grounds well maintained. Have you ever said the words “that looks like a nice place to eat”? We all have, and it demonstrates how important curb appeal and first impressions are.

What to do:

- Find one block and do a demonstration project
- Make that block shine! (What’s IN the building is just as important)
- Make it a public/private partnership
- Promote the businesses - specifically!
- Success breeds success!



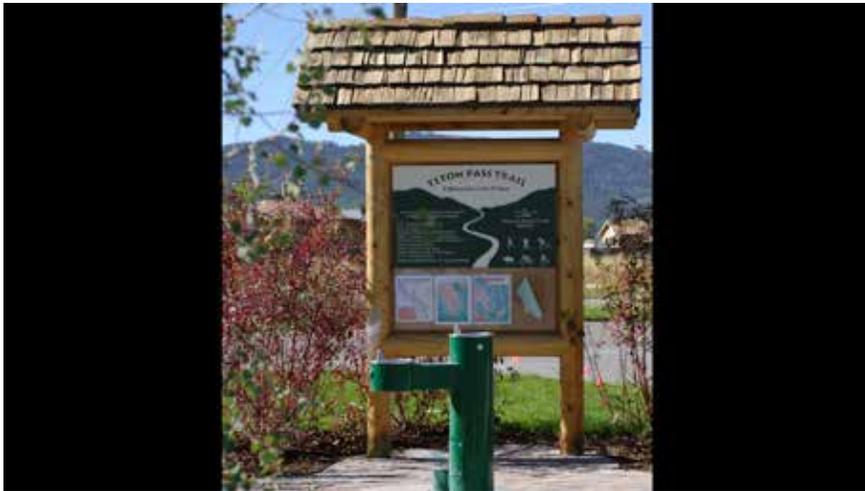
What to do:

- Work with local property owners on removing blown-out or dilapidated signs like the one shown here (bottom left).
- “The Block that Rocks” is a promise that this block does, in fact, rock. Considering that the businesses here are no longer in business (or seem that way) and that the buildings are in very poor shape, it sends a message of “this is as good as it gets,” which isn’t the case. Suggestion: Perhaps say “Stay tuned:

This block is going to rock!” and then tell us when and what will be happening here. That way it’s an invitation to come back and check on the progress.

Item #6, above, is about providing visitor information around the county. What to do:

- Add visitor information kiosks in perhaps 20 locations around the county
- Add QR code posts where it makes sense
- Build a Visitor Information Center gazebo in a few places



Since visitors don't just travel during business hours, offering information around the clock is important. Include brochure distribution.

In North Platte, Nebraska (top left and right), their VIC offers brochures in weather-proof holders, so visitors always have access to information.

Visitor information kiosks can offer the information visitors need 24 hours a day/7 days a week. They should cross-promote activities, events, attractions and amenities. The more visitors see there is to do, the longer they will stay and the more money they will spend. Every site should cross-sell to other sites,

attractions and amenities.

Several of these kiosks (bottom left) provide information along the Teton Pass Trail system.

This attractive kiosk is in Ashland, Oregon (bottom right), home of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. It is staffed during busy times but when it's closed there are still brochures available attached to the windows, so it's working 24/7.

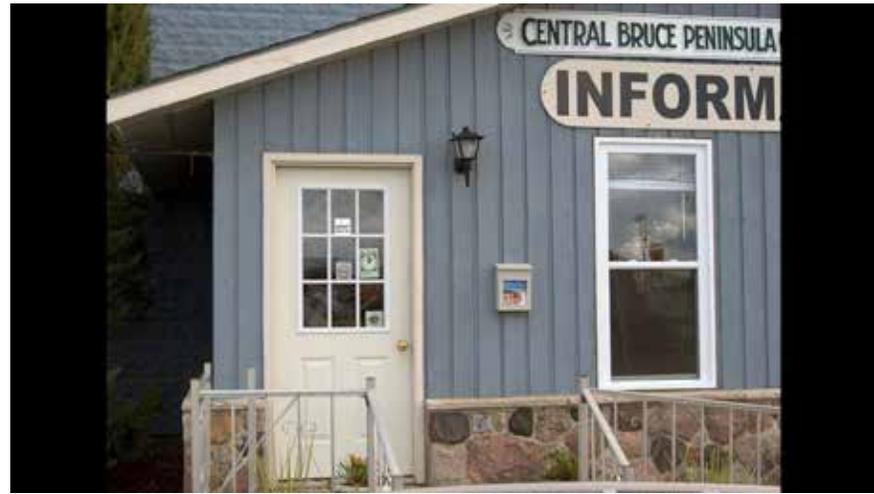


This kiosk in Kingsport, TN (top left and right) is built to coordinate with the town's architecture. Up close (top right) you can see the brochure holders. Businesses pay \$5 a month to have their brochures displayed, and the \$5 pays to maintain and stock brochures in the kiosk, plus provides funds for construction of additional kiosks.

Consider placing visitor information kiosks around the area, each cross-selling other activities, attractions and services. This kiosk (bottom left) in Beatty, Nevada, was built from a kit by a local service organization and the displays

were built by a local carpenter at a cost of approximately \$3,500. Maps and brochures wrap around the interior structure.

Jackson, Wyoming (bottom right) provides a variety of visitor information brochures in this sheltered rack under the entryway roof of their visitor information center. Even the use of real estate brochure holders can, for very little investment, provide easy access to printed information. Remember that technology is not a substitute for printed materials once we're in the county.



Gig Harbor, Washington (top left) provides visitor information and brochure distribution in a convenient location - at their downtown public restrooms.

Banff, Alberta sets up portable visitor information kiosks throughout town (bottom left). These are usually staffed, and are able to offer brochures and materials when they are not staffed.

In the Central Bruce Peninsula in Ontario, visitors can get information after business hours from this simple weather proof brochure holder (top right).

QR (Quick Response) code posts (sample concept for Barrie, Ontario, bottom right) are an additional way you can provide easy access to visitor information for people to access on their smart phones.

Think about places where you can provide visitor information, whether a kiosk, gazebo, or a simple QR code post: At the courthouse in Knoxville, in two or three locations in every downtown, at local parks, near hotels and lodging establishments, etc.



Adding visitor information right outside the doors of the Sprint Car Hall of Fame would be a perfect way to make sure visitors come back. Note the area just to the right of the front doors. This would be an ideal location for a wall-mounted display like the one shown in North Platte (previous page.)

Even the windmill in Pella (bottom left) should have an exterior display rack where visitors can get information. Every attraction in the county (marinas, state parks, the dam, downtowns, hotels, etc.) should include exterior visitor information. Make it easy and spending will increase.

The Scholte House (top right) should also include visitor information - not just about the museum, but also about Pella or Marion County.

The plaza area (bottom right) should include two or three free-standing visitor information kiosks. NOTE: These kiosks are the one instance where new electronic technologies are not preferred. Visitors like having a printed piece they can browse through or read while in a local restaurant or in their hotel room.



Other visitor information locations should include the college - in perhaps half of dozen locations, at the village (top left), and even at the Pella train station (top right). You are home to several state park locations (bottom right) and each of these creates an inexpensive opportunity to provide visitor information. In this example, mounting a brochure holder on the concrete block wall (between the two right doors) could be a great opportunity enticing visitors into your towns.

Our All Access Video Library includes a video that goes into much more detail - including costs - for developing visitor information kiosks, brochure holders, and QR code posts.



The Red Rock Visitor Center does a great job (top two photos) providing visitor information 24/7, 365 days a year.

The Chamber of Commerce (bottom two photos) should be the very top priority for visitor information. Just to the right of the doors is an excellent opportunity to place a wall-mounted display rack.

What to do: Create a small group of two or three people and develop a list of your most popular visitor destinations. Not just attractions, but hotels,

downtowns, parks, campgrounds, marinas, and attractions. Then determine whether each is best suited for a wall-mounted display, a QR code post, or a free-standing display.

Create an inventory of the locations, the types of displays, and then contact vendors for costs. Depending on your budget, you can then prioritize them, perhaps adding four or five a year. Start with your downtown locations, the state park areas.

7 Parking is not just for lovers



What to do

WHEN it comes time to update the signs:

- FREE all-day parking •

Note: These signs are beautiful! Great job!

Visitors typically will spend at least four hours in a downtown for the number one visitor activity: shopping and dining, so finding longer-term parking is essential. Be sure to let people know where they can find all day parking, as this sign (bottom left) does.

Two-hour, and even three-hour parking dramatically reduces spending and repeat visits.

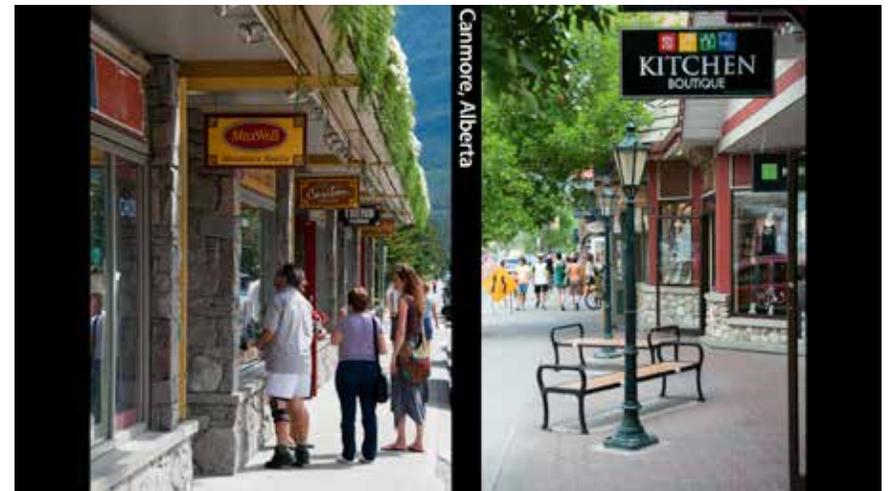
When a visitor gets a parking ticket, even if they were in the wrong, they tend to write off the city. They might not come back.

Angle-in parking increases spending by more than 20% and increases the number of parking spaces by a third.

What to do:

- If you must limit parking to two hour, tell visitors WHERE they can find 4-hour or all-day parking.

8 Signage equals \$\$\$ - the rule of blade signs

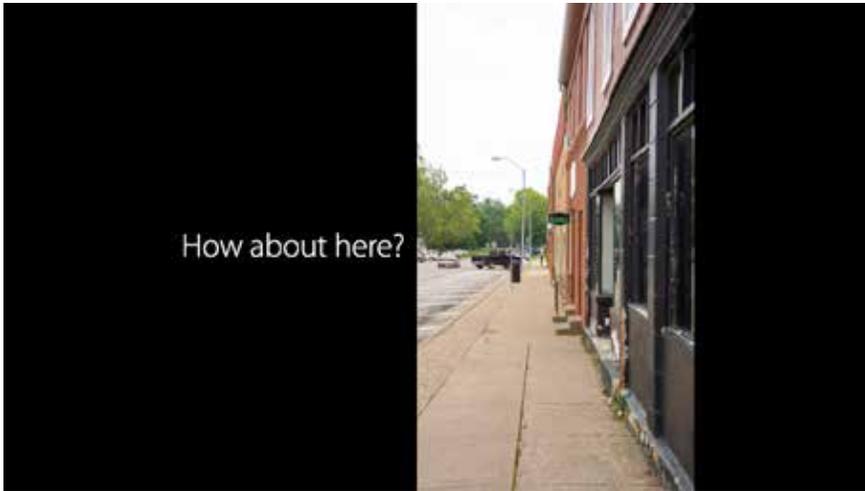


The right kind of signage can make or break a retail shop or restaurant. How will potential customers know what you're offering unless you tell them? When visitors drive (or walk) through downtown, signs that are placed flat against the building are almost impossible to read. Perpendicular (blade) signs take care of that problem.

Signs placed perpendicular to the building allow drivers and pedestrians to read them easily, even from a distance. Note the use of blade signs in Leavenworth, WA (top right); Nantucket, MA (bottom left); and Canmore,

Alberta (bottom right). Successful towns use blade signs.

Perpendicular signs are seen nearly ten times more frequently than facade-mounted signs. Keep them consistent in height and width so you don't create sign clutter. General rules: No lower than 7' above the sidewalk, no higher than 9' (meaning the signs can't be any larger than 24" tall), and no wider than 42". Rules like this would be great for all three of your downtowns.



Downtown retail signs should follow these guidelines:

- Lettering should be one inch tall for every twelve feet of viewing distance.
- Script lettering should always be avoided.
- The signage should be decorative to enhance the ambiance of the city. Real signs, no billboards or painted plywood signs.
- Retailers and attractions should promote the primary lure first, then the business name.
- Keep verbiage to four words - no more than six words.

Note how difficult it is to see what's in any of these shops (photos top right, bottom right and left). You have to cross the street to see what's there.

In many cases the only way we knew what were in the shops was to be across the street and look above the awnings. Always avoid the use of plastic and vinyl banners and temporary signs - unless promoting a special deal, special event, or while a permanent sign is being fabricated. You have beautiful historic downtowns. Don't clutter them up with banners and temporary signs.



On several occasions I was asked if I visited the brewery in Knoxville, yet I simply couldn't find it. Finally I asked someone and they pointed across the street (top left). Unfortunately, the lettering blends right into the brick, and without any beautification I didn't even think it was an operating business. By the way, it's a fabulous addition to downtown Knoxville.

Suggestion: Always use contrasting colors on signs - if the background is dark, use light lettering, and vice versa. Take a look at the Northeastern Nevada Museum (top right). Silver on gray is very hard to read. Compare the sign with

the updated one (bottom left). Which one is easier to read? Just repainting the sign lead to a 25% increase in the number of visitors they hosted.

Suggestion: Always promote what it is you're selling before the name of the store. What do you think the Laffin Crab is? (bottom right) Restaurant? Comedy club? They're no longer in business - they sold kites and windsocks. You'll entice more customers into your shop if you lure them in by promoting what you sell BEFORE the name of the store. Make it easy and promote the lure - what will pull customers in.



At first glance, it's hard to tell what "Exsalconce" is (top left). Is it a hair salon? Graphic design firm? Clothing shop?

The "Next Chapter" (top right) is a cute store, but what does it sell? I would assume books, but the window displays don't show books. The "next chapter" name suggests that it's a second-hand store.

What does "Hard Knox" sell. The "bar" is hard to read from a distance? Or "A 6 ft Geek"? (bottom left) Is this a computer repair store? Technology center?

Does the "Dairy Shoppe" sell general dairy products? Ice cream? If they sell ice cream, they could entice more customers by promoting their ice cream on their signage (bottom right). A business like this could dramatically increase its sales to visitors by making it obvious what it is they sell.

What to do:

- No more than 8 words on a sign, four or fewer is best.
- Use only one simple graphic
- Sell the lure first, name of the store second.



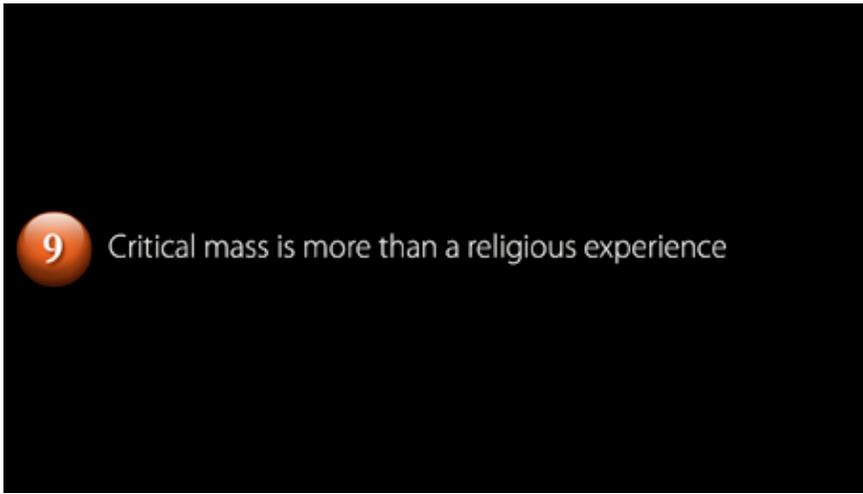
"The Silver Lining" has a beautiful sign and entrance (top left), but without knowing what they sell, why would I go in?

Grizzly Rick's Market (top right) increased their business substantially by adding the extra signage promoting their "snacks, sundries, drinks." Visitors to the town weren't enticed to go into a market, but they were enticed in once they knew they could get snacks and drinks.

This great free-standing sign (bottom left) does an excellent job promoting

what the business has to sell - it's a seafood restaurant.

The Jackpot Golf Club (bottom right) makes sure visitors know they are open to the public - when you don't make people guess what you have to offer, your sales will increase.



9. Develop the “critical mass” needed to be a destination. Successful downtowns need to have a “critical mass” of like businesses grouped together. This would include a MINIMUM, in three lineal blocks:

- TEN places that sell food: soda fountain, coffee shop, bistro, cafe, fine dining, family restaurant, wine store, deli, bakery, confectionary.
- TEN destination retail shops: galleries, antiques, home accents, outfitters, collectibles, books, kitchen supplies, garden.
- TEN places open after 6:00 pm: entertainment, theater, performing arts, bars and bistros, specialty shops, dining, open air markets, etc.

Think of antique malls, food courts, gas stations. People are attracted to the choices. This is referred to as “clustering” and every successful downtown does this. Sometimes you have to orchestrate the effort. Begin with the property owners - not the tenants. It only takes one-third buy-in to see results.

What to do: For Knoxville and Pleasantville - once you have your brand, recruit supporting businesses and promote them specifically.

Just start with one block downtown - make it a showcase.

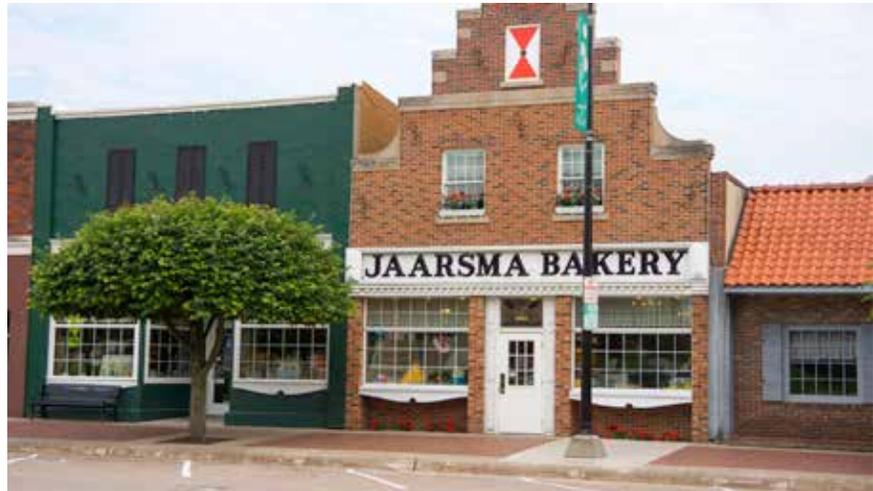
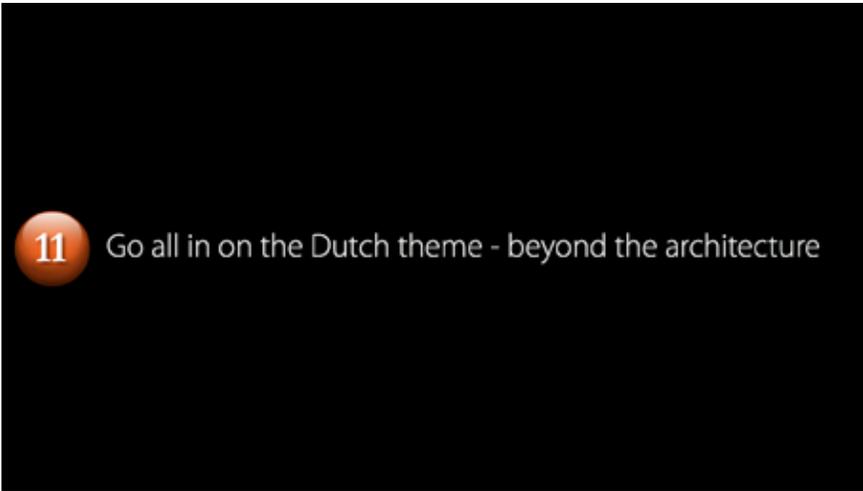


10. Extend retail hours. 70% of all consumer retail spending takes place after 6:00 pm. Downtowns need to develop the “mall mentality” to increase their success. This includes:

- Shops being open consistent hours and days.
- Shops staying open late into the evening hours.
- Clustering - like-businesses grouped together.
- Anchor tenants - sometimes they need to be recruited. An anchor tenant can be as simple as “the best cinnamon rolls in Iowa.”
- Become a central gathering place. A place locals like to spend time in.

People spend the night where there are things to do after 6:00 pm. Overnight visitors spend FOUR TIMES more than day visitors. Conferences, conventions, trade shows are booked based on your nightlife, not just because you have meeting facilities.

What to do:
Create a “Shared Worker Program.” Watch the video “Is your downtown open after 6 pm?” then implement the program. This should be a VERY top priority!



11. Embrace your brand. Work so that your brand really comes alive!

The architecture in Pella is beautiful! But to really bring Pella's brand to life and become a successful destination, visitors want to become totally immersed in the brand. These means you must go beyond just the architecture and public art.

What to do:

- Recruit Dutch artisans, bakers, restaurant owners - Actually go there and

recruit them to Pella!

- Have more people dressed in period costume.
- Become more bike-friendly. In Amsterdam, there's one car for every 100 bikes.
- Make sure ALL of your events are focused on your brand.
- Promote the city to every Dutch organization in the U.S.

When we arrive we should feel like we've just arrived in Holland. You want visitors to feel as though they just arrived in a foreign country. Even having people speaking Dutch would be a great addition and would add to the



experience. Visitors LOVE the Jaarsma Bakery for this very reason. The folks at the Historical Village do a great job but we'd love to see it even more experiential. Can you create a year round home for someone making the wooden clogs (bottom right) and other hand-crafted goods. Glass blowers? Any other artisans from Holland? Restaurants? Musicians and musical instruments? Once again, actually go there and recruit small businesses to America - and into Pella. There they are a dime a dozen, but here they'd be really unique and have a great opportunity of becoming an anchor tenant.

A highlight was actually touring the working windmill - actually made in Holland and assembled in Pella by Dutch crews.

Knoxville should do the same with its brand. Recruit businesses that support the brand and then promote them specifically. The more you have, the further people will come, the longer they will stay, and the more often they will come back. While Pella has a head start on its brand, every community - and especially Knoxville - has tremendous potential to capitalize on its brand once a direction has been identified.



12. Bring downtown to life with street entertainment. Musicians, performers, mimes, magicians, are all great draws for a downtown district.

Start with Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays during the peak season. Make it a place to attract locals from throughout the county, then visitors will follow.

Some cities have budgets for street entertainers, typically paying \$35 to each group or person. They make additional funds from tips. See the video in the All Access Library about street performers and vendors. It's a great way to start.

People are attracted to vibrant places, and one way to help make downtown more active is to recruit street performers.

This magician is performing on the sidewalk in Cannon Beach, Oregon (top right).

Musician in Nelson, BC (bottom left), and a led-glass artisan at work in Sisters, Oregon (bottom right). Each downtown should be a hub of activity. That makes it vibrant and inviting.



What to do:

- Invite buskers, street artisans - they must fit the Dutch theme in Pella. In Knoxville or Pleasantville, just invite any activity that will bring downtown to life and will get your local residents to spend time there. Remember, visitors go where you go. If you don't hang out in your downtown, neither will they.
- Start with Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays during the peak season.
- Pay them \$35 a day - use an annual \$10,000 budget.
- Bring in street vendors as well, featuring only Dutch goods.

The three photos you see on this page (top right, bottom two photos) were taken in Amsterdam last summer. There are all kinds of outdoor cafes, lots of street vendors and musicians. It's "alive," vibrant, inviting and exciting.

There are bike racks everywhere. If you begin to "think" like the Dutch, pretty soon it will become part of your lifestyle as well. In Knoxville, if you go with a wheeled-sports brand, think like the enthusiasts and it will guide you as to the types of businesses and activities you want to attract into your downtown.

13 Build and promote public restrooms

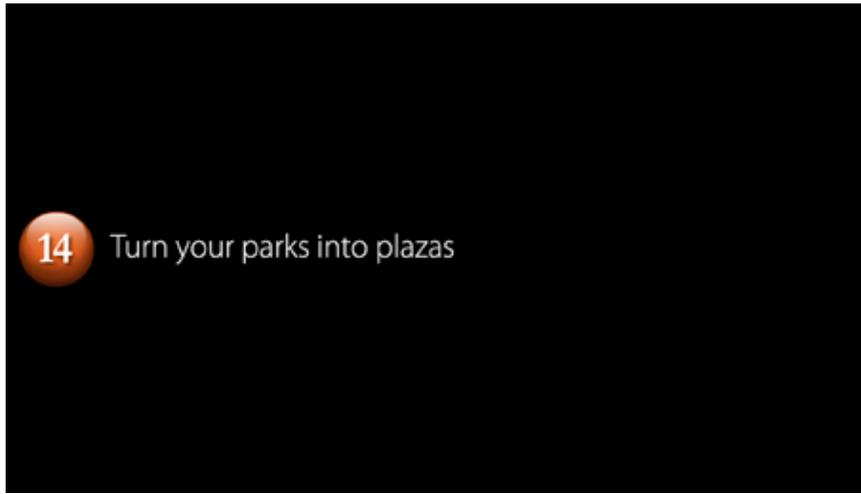


13. Build and promote public restrooms.

The most common reason for travelers to stop is to use restroom facilities, and when you post signs saying they are only for customers, you are essentially telling visitors to go away.

Don't post signs that say "Restrooms for customers only" or "No public restrooms." (bottom right) Instead, tell people *where* they can find public restrooms!

This should be a very top priority. Why? Because relieved visitors spend more. The restroom you see (top right) is located in Sulphur Springs, Texas about an hour east of Dallas. There are two of these in their downtown plaza and each is built using one-way glass. When inside (bottom left) you can see out, but outsiders can't see in. These were approximately \$30,000 each and they have become quite the tourist attraction in themselves!



14. Turn parks into plazas to create intimate gathering spaces. Make them active places for the community to gather and do things, not just green spaces. Gathering places have a focal point - locations for performances or events, seating, public art, water features, etc.

Successful downtowns are rich with “gathering places” and alive with activity.

Successful “third places” attract people because, besides being beautiful spaces, they’re full of life and activity. There’s things to do.

The “first place” is where we live (top right). The “second place” is where we work (bottom left). And the “third place” is where we go to spend leisure time and be with friends (bottom right).

All three of your downtowns should have a central plaza, and it should be a gathering space, not just a pretty space. This may mean replacing lawn areas with actual paver stones so the plaza can host vendors, entertainers, art and car shows, etc.



Plazas make great gathering spaces. They work best when they:

- Have a focal point, such as a fountain or other water feature, or a stage
- Are in a high foot-traffic area
- Have food nearby (restaurants, markets, food vendors)
- Have interesting shops nearby
- Have plenty of benches and tables and chairs
- Have beautiful landscaping
- Have some covered areas

- Offer a few activities, such as bocci ball, horseshoes, chess, or interactive fountains

Piazas in Italy (top left and right) have been successful community and visitor gathering spaces for hundreds of years.

Fallbrook, CA (bottom right and left) removed a dilapidated building from their downtown, and turned the space into this permanent open-air market, as part of their downtown revitalization strategy. There's always something going on there, and it has become a major gathering space.

Downtown
Oxnard, California

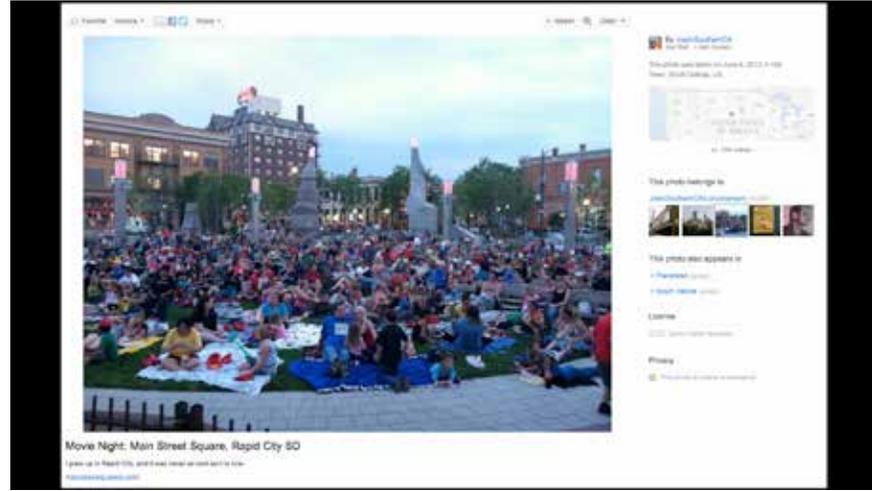


Oxnard, California is considering plans to change their downtown park (top left) into a multi-purpose gathering space like this (top right). The new design includes space for an outdoor market, an amphitheater, and an interactive fountain.

Rapid City, South Dakota turned a downtown parking lot into this amazing plaza area (bottom left and right). This space includes a stage, lawn area for seating or multi-purpose events, an interactive fountain, and ice skating throughout the winter. The plaza has several restaurants and shops bordering

it. The plaza is programmed year-round, so there is always something going on, and it has turned Rapid City into as big a tourism draw as Mt. Rushmore. Remember that plazas MUST be programmed and they should always be commerce-driven, meaning be a place for vendors, performers, art shows, concerts, restaurants, food trucks, exhibitions, etc.

Rapid City's Main Street Square earns more than \$120,000 each season just renting ice skates. It's now a year round gathering area for locals and visitors.



The interactive fountains in Rapid City's Main Street Square attracts fun-seekers at all hours of the day and night (top left). During the summer months, the city hosts "Monday Night Movies on the Square," which draws more than 3,000 people into downtown Rapid City each Monday (top right).

And what about downtown Rapid City businesses?

- An informal survey of 14 businesses all say "Best thing Rapid City has ever done."
- There are no retail vacancies.
- There is a much lower turnover of retailers.

- Businesses now stay open later into the evenings.
- Many businesses have broken sales records.
- Average age of population is dropping - young people want to live there.
- Increase in conferences, conventions, and trade shows.

What to do:

- Over time convert the squares (all three communities) to plaza areas with performance space.
- Host multi-evening public markets.
- Use BOTH plaza areas and program them.

15 Beef up your outdoor cafe seating



15. Increase outdoor dining. Successful downtowns nearly always provide outdoor dining and sidewalk cafes in season. Many communities have found that outdoor dining pulls people downtown - people are drawn to active places, and outdoor dining makes the activity visible.

Wide sidewalks can easily be used for outdoor dining.

Of course, fair-weather locations are perfect for dining outdoors, such as Newport on Levee (top right), but many colder locations also provide outdoor dining, using portable heaters and awnings, such as Nelson, BC (bottom

right). Note how Nelson used parking spaces to increase the available room for outdoor dining. In Nelson, the restaurants store the portable decks in the winter for snow removal.



Wolfville, Nova Scotia (top left and right) also allows sidewalks and parking spaces to be converted for outdoor dining. In Wolfville, restaurants use the sidewalks for dining and route pedestrian traffic around, using the decks you see here. Defining the dining area with pots of shrubs adds beauty to function.

Asheville, NC (bottom left and right) encourages outdoor dining, and its popularity attracts many people downtown. Notice in the photo (bottom right) where two parking spaces were replaced with a sidewalk extension allowing for additional seating. Also note the use of umbrellas, which create a sense

of intimacy. In Asheville they don't require fences, barriers and other requirements and patrons, when they see someone in a wheel chair or with a stroller simply make room so they can scoot by. They have never had a lawsuit and they let the downtown flourish without bombarding merchants with rules, regulations and burdensome requirements.



Outdoor dining is a great way to lure customers in to your restaurant. Some key points: Keep the space intimate by providing some kind of boundary - either a small fence, pots of flowers, umbrellas although this shouldn't be a requirement. And make sure the space is attractive, with flowers, umbrellas, shrubs, and other decorative elements.

Bulb-outs can also add more space for outdoor dining, like this one in Asheville, NC (top left).

These pots, hanging baskets, and fencing make this outdoor seating more intimate (top right).

In Canmore, Alberta (bottom left and right), these restaurants use pots, small fences, and Catalina umbrellas to separate their dining areas and make them attractive and intimate. Canmore, a town about the size of Pella, is home to nearly two-dozen restaurants with outdoor seating.



Argyle Street in Halifax, Nova Scotia is famous for its 22 restaurants in a two and a half block area. It has become a nightlife destination for the younger crowd - a perfect example of critical mass! In fact, it rivals the waterfront area in downtown Halifax.

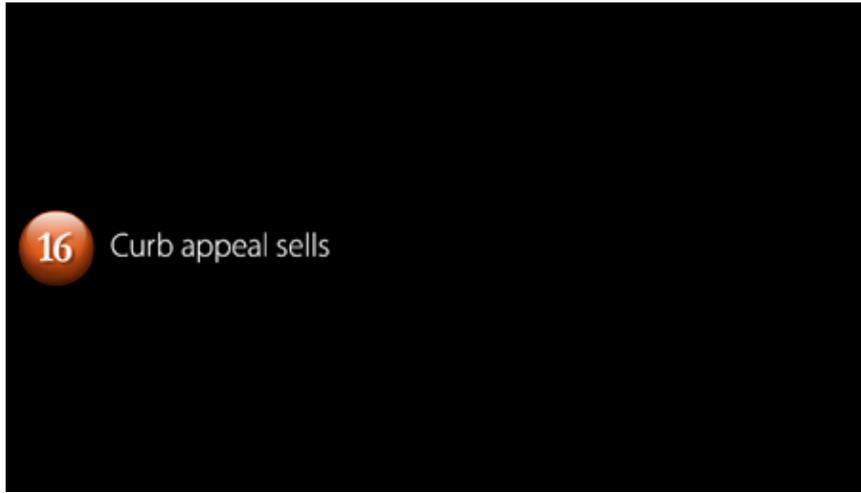
On this page the top two photos are in Canmore. The bottom two photos are in Barrie, Ontario where in just one year they went from one restaurant with outdoor seating to seven and now it's growing beyond that.

Restaurants frequently use the sidewalks for dining, using the former parking spaces to create a new sidewalk outside their dining area. It works! During the winter months, the decks are put into storage.

What to do:

- Encourage it! • Make it easy!
- Don't be afraid to lose a few parking spots.
- April through October.

16 Curb appeal sells



16. Curb appeal.

One of the most common ingredients of a successful downtown is beautification. Streetscapes are one piece of the puzzle that helps make a downtown successful, and storefronts are another piece - when they're attractive and inviting, people are much more likely to be enticed inside and spend money. Good curb appeal - the combination of streetscapes and storefronts - is an investment with an incredible return.

Merchants need to think of the sidewalks in front of their stores as part of their shops. They are the entrance, and when they are clean, free of weeds and

trash, and have pots of flowers, benches, and decorative signage, they entice people inside.

Shops in Mahone Bay, NS (top right and bottom left) are invariably attractive - and people love to visit the town and spend money in those shops.

Beautification includes more than flowers - merchants should use the outdoors as a place for "window displays" of their merchandise, attractively arranged, as these shop owners did in Canmore, Alberta (bottom right).



Fredericksburg, Texas (population 12,000) hosts nearly three million visitors annually for its wealth of antique shops, and is the most visited small town in Texas. Visitors drive from Dallas, Houston and San Antonio - hours away - to spend weekends in this charming town (all photos this page).

The merchants have created a beautiful setting with potted shrubs, planters, annual color, window boxes, decorative signage, beautiful lighting, benches, and covered sidewalks. These photos were taken in March - and the hill country has some wild temperature swings. Most of the plantings are

evergreen.

The merchants made a co-op project out of their beautification efforts - purchasing pots in bulk, soil, and plants.

FACT: Curb appeal can account for up to 70% of first-time sales at restaurants, golf courses, wineries, retail shops and lodging facilities.



Neenah, Wisconsin (top left) did a downtown makeover. Although this streetscape is clean and neat, compare it to the street just one block down, after the makeover (top right). Note how the planters soften the facades and create a fresher, more inviting sidewalk. Retail sales in the block with the beautification increased by more than 25% of the non-beautified street.

The small town of Cambria, CA (bottom left) shows off its excellent beautification, including great retail blade signs.

Women account for 80% of all spending. Add plenty of benches downtown for weary shoppers and spouses to be comfortable. Encourage people to linger. This photo (bottom right) shows what a good strategy that is - add benches and people will enjoy hanging out.

What to do:

- Create a buying co-op or create a BID to fund beautification efforts. This way it's a group effort versus each merchant doing their own thing - if they do anything.



What to do: Make sure you have plenty of benches! In Pella and Knoxville you should have perhaps 30 to 40 benches in your downtown. They should ALWAYS be placed at the facade facing out and each flanked with pots or planters.

These examples (top photos) are in Pella and are a great start. I was very impressed by the number of merchants - and even home owners - in each of the downtowns who went to the trouble of adding pots or planters to make their stores more inviting.

Especially in Pella, where home owners, like the one shown here (bottom right) added themed elements reinforcing the city's brand.



In Knoxville, The Next Chapter has done a good job adding potted plants to each side of the entrance. It makes the store seem welcoming, tells us instantly that this is an operating business, and it gets our attention as we walk or drive through town.

The theater in downtown Pella (top left) also does a great job. Now consider adding another pot to the left of the bench and perhaps two or three other smaller planters along the facade.

Casey's General Store is architecturally beautiful, but imagine it with a bench and some pots and/or planters along the facade.

Always work to soften the transition from the facade to the sidewalk. When you look at the lower right photo the planters down the street grab your attention and you're enticed to see what's down there, while the corner store looks drab and uninviting. Beautification is an investment with an incredible return.



The shop owner (top left) does a good job extending window displays to exterior spaces. Suggestion: Instead of No Food, No Drinks, No this and no that, consider something a little more inviting along the lines of: "Thank you for not bringing food or drinks into the store." You are in the hospitality business.

I was not sure if Tasos Steakhouse was still in business. What would your first impression be? Now imagine if there were tables and chairs outside along with half a dozen planters and an updated sign! This would be an instantly thriving place to eat and to spend time.

In Alpena, Michigan (a town of 10,000), even the bike racks include top-mounted planter boxes that add to downtown's ambiance.

17 Consider some trompe l'oeil for facades



• Consider using trompe l'oeil to add beauty and character to plain building facades. Some buildings would be good “canvasses” for murals. Consider trompe l'oeil, (French for “fool the eye”) to disguise blank walls with scenes and architectural details painted so they look real.

These photos show a trompe l'oeil project in progress. This building started as just a blank wall; the artist (top right) working on the beginning of the mural, and the finished work (bottom left).

These buildings (bottom right) would be excellent candidates for trompe l'oeil murals both along the front and sides. Huntsville, Texas actually created a “facade easement” program where the property owner deeded the facade to the city as an easement and then through grants were able to create the trompe l'oeil murals.

Another great candidate for a mural is the side of the brew pub in Knoxville (photo top left, next page).

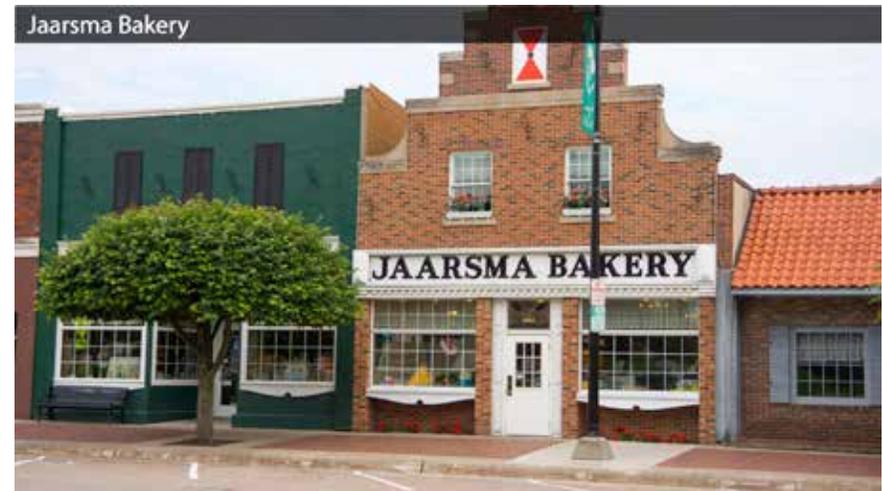
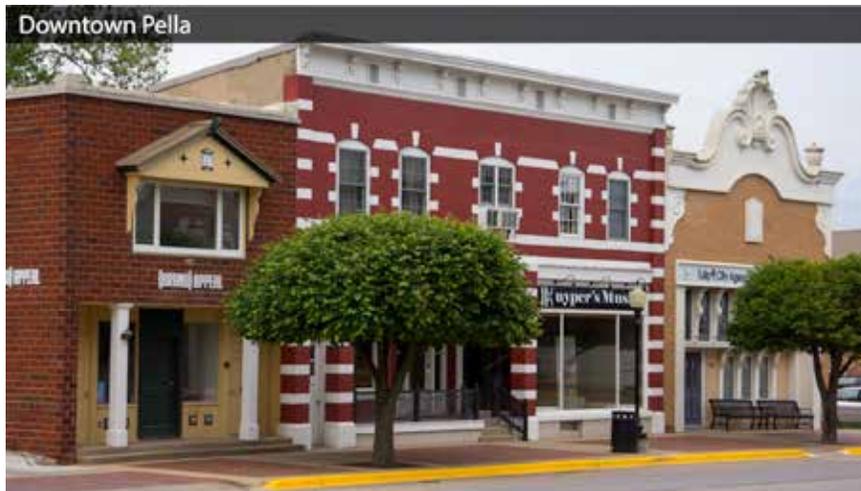
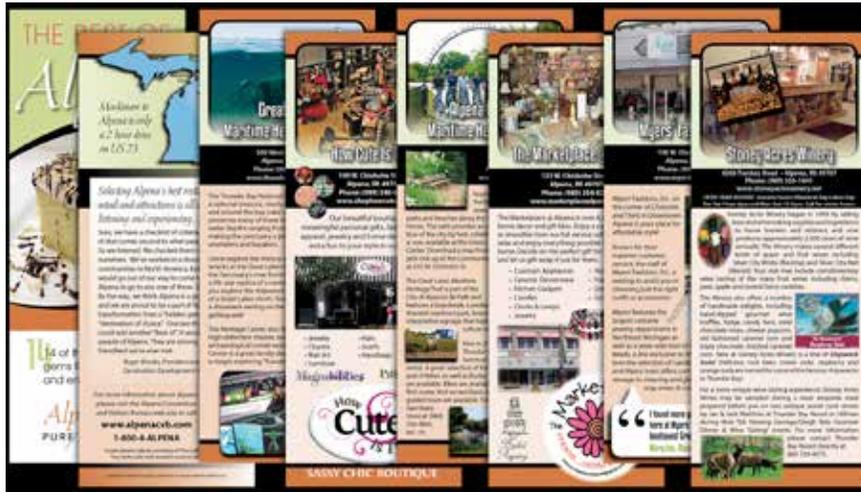


In a mall, the anchor tenant is the major store that attracts the most customers, i.e. Macy's or Bloomingdale's. While most people come to the mall for the anchor tenant, all the other shops benefit from the increased foot traffic. Downtowns must also have at least one anchor tenant. If your town doesn't yet have that anchor, one or two need to be recruited.

A good case of an anchor tenant is the Southern Baptist Texas Barbecue in Huntsville, Texas. The Barbecue was started as a fund raiser for the little church next door. You might not want to eat there unless you had heard about it - and

many people have. Bus loads of visitors come from Houston and Dallas for lunch, and GQ Magazine (bottom right) listed it as one of their "top ten meals to fly for" in the world!

Be sure to promote your anchor businesses - specifically. Like every mall, every town relies on the anchor businesses to pull customers in. All the other businesses benefit by that.



A "Best Of" guide can have a dramatic impact. Its purpose is to promote your "anchor tenants" - those businesses and attractions that your visitors can't find closer to home - those you would drive an hour or more to visit.

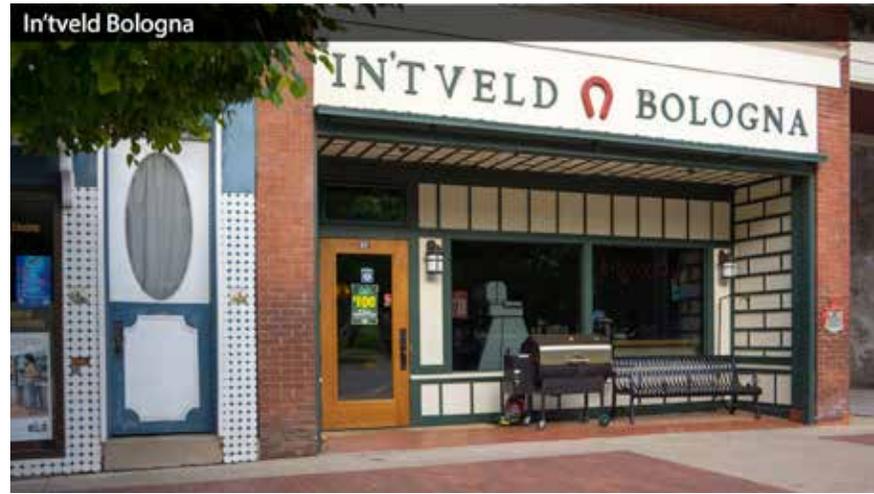
It's important that the brochure NOT look like a bunch of ads. Use an advertorial format; include lots of photos with specific, descriptive text.

It's critical to establish criteria to select the very best that you have. Market your best: 10 restaurants, 10 retail shops, 10 activities, and 10 attractions.

Sample criteria:

- Must be highly regarded (80%+ positive peer reviews, regional publications)
- Must have good curb appeal
- Must be open June through October (to start)
- Must be open until at least 6:00 pm and be open six days a week
- Must be unique to your brand (if possible)

Don't let local politics kill this effort! The example shown in the top two photos promote the Best of Alpena, Michigan.



A few ideas that could be included in your "Best Of" guide:

- Downtown Pella
- Jaarsma Bakery
- The Historic Village
- In'tveld Bologna
- Bos Landen Golf Course
- Iowa Bike and Fitness
- Monarch's Restaurant & Lounge

The guide should only include restaurants, retail shops, activities, and attractions, but not lodging facilities. Why? Because you want your hotels and B&Bs to hand out the Best Of brochure when guests ask, "Where's a good place to eat?" and most lodging facilities won't hand out brochures that promote their competitors.



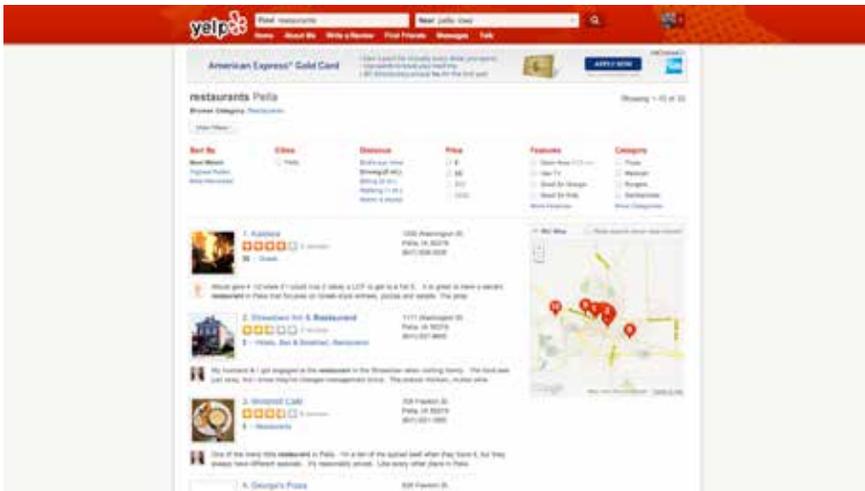
For the area we'd include the best of all three of your communities, not just Pella. Even if we're coming to Pella as the destination, it's important to showcase what else, in Marion County, is worth making a special trip to and for.

- Knoxville's Coffee Connection

These are just a few suggestions. Consider having a travel writer or someone from outside the county come in and go through your businesses and

activities and actually define what or who should be included in your Best Of guide. This way you can get through the politics of not picking one business over another. The vetting process will also help with the process. For instance, one criteria might be that at least 80% of all peer reviews (TripAdvisor, Yelp) are positive.

Do NOT promote everyone. Promote your top six restaurants, top six retail shops and top six activities or attractions. Everyone will benefit!



• And, of course, Peace Tree Brewing Company should be included in the Best Of guide.

You can use websites that give customer reviews to help you select the businesses that should be included. More and more people rely on sites like TripAdvisor, Yelp, Urban Spoon and others. When a business is featured in Midwest Living, or a travel magazine that is obviously a third-party endorsement as well.



19. Toss the mission statements and sell the experience. Mission statements are great for guiding your direction and keeping you on track, but they aren't effective taglines. They don't do anything to promote your town.

"Pella ... historically preserved, distinctively progressive" and "Knoxville - Progress, Passion, Productivity" don't really tell you anything about the towns. They don't set the towns apart from others, give any "flavor" or give you a reason to go there. Those statements are more mission statement than effective marketing slogans. And they could fit many, many other towns. In

fact, is there a town anywhere that doesn't consider themselves historically preserved and progressive? Or focus on progress, passion and productivity?

What to do:

- Always sell the experience before the location
- Give a reason why we should visit - not a mission statement
- No need to market the organization - just the website
- In ads, use photography. It really is worth a thousand words. Show me what you look like!



Brochures are usually displayed in a rack with a bunch of other brochures and rack cards. One way to get your brochures noticed is to catch people's attention using **yellow**. Yellow attracts the eye.

Also, note what's on the top quarter of your brochure cover. Make sure it promotes the experience first, so that is what people see first.

Note the brochures top right - Both use yellow and sell the experience before selling the business. In the two ads at the top left of this page and the bottom

right of the previous page, you'll see that the experience comes first and the actual city is down at the bottom of the ad. You need to follow suit.

Always promote the experience first. Promote what sets you apart. Pella's unique qualities include its genuine Dutch ambiance - it's like experiencing Europe in America. Promote that first, and THEN that you'll find this experience in Pella, Iowa. Another suggestion: Always use photography first. People gravitate to reality more than artist renditions. Photos make it "real."

20 Toss the saying or tagline "A touch of Holland"

21 Think beyond Des Moines - you've got something special



What to do

America's Incredible Dutch Village
America's Amazing Dutch Experience
The Netherlands are as close as Central Iowa
Authentically, originally Dutch

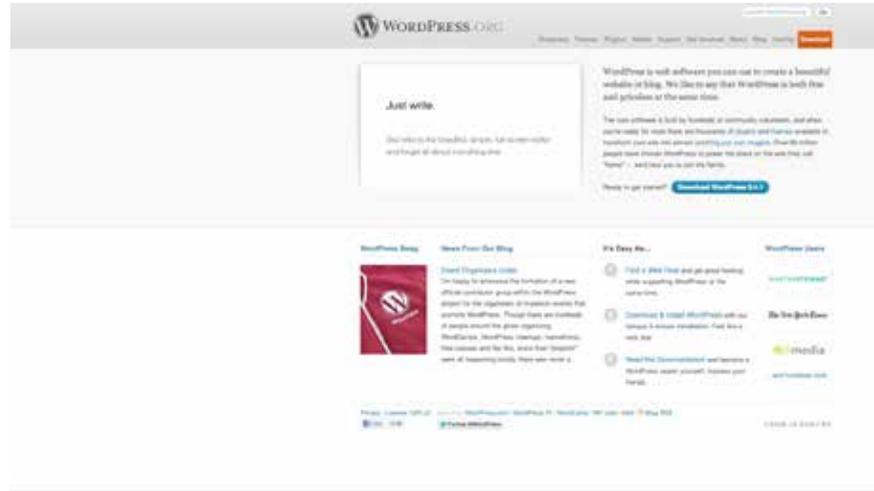
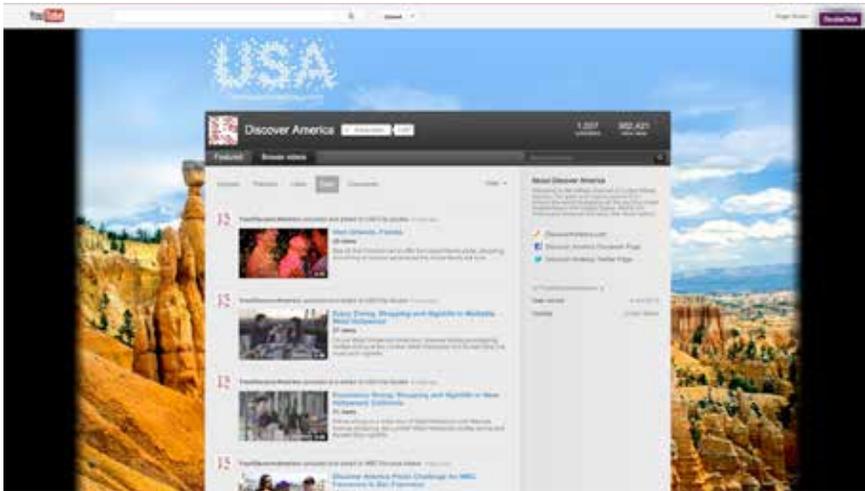
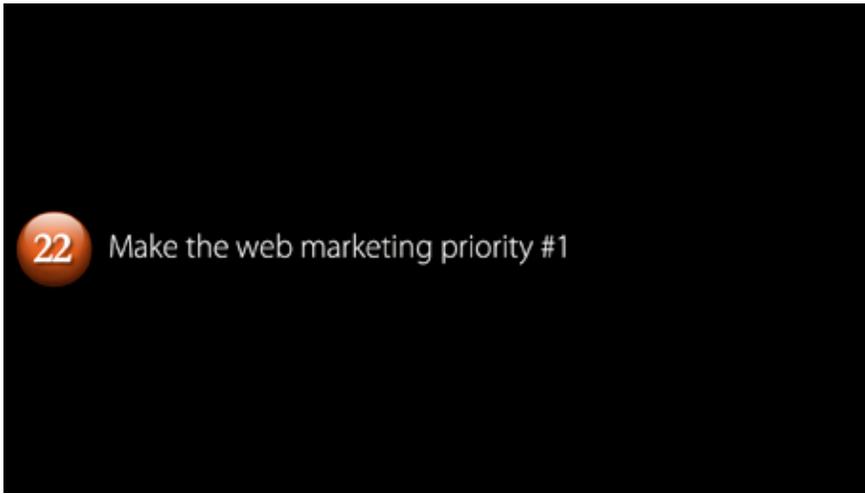
Instead of "Red Rock Dam" it should be the "Red Rock Dyke"

What to do:

Our secret shoppers thought "A touch of Holland" meant there was just a smidgen of Holland. The fact is, you have a LOT of Holland! Don't understate it - promote it!

Start with the Midwest's Dutch Treat and eventually, as you implement the suggestions made in this assessment, grow it to "America's Dutch Treat."

Think beyond just your major market areas. We've worked in a thousand cities in 45 states, across Canada and in Europe. What you have in Pella is really a terrific base to work from. Remember, that if you implement these things you'll see your tourism spending triple. And Knoxville is a very important partner in this process and it also has tremendous potential once it finds its niche and begins the product development effort.



Rework your marketing budgets - individually and collectively.

88% of destination marketing and economic development organizations spend more on printed materials than on the Internet. They have it backwards.

The vast majority of people do their travel planning on the Internet, and most of those do it at work. They want immediate results, and 86% of search engine users don't go past the second page of search results.

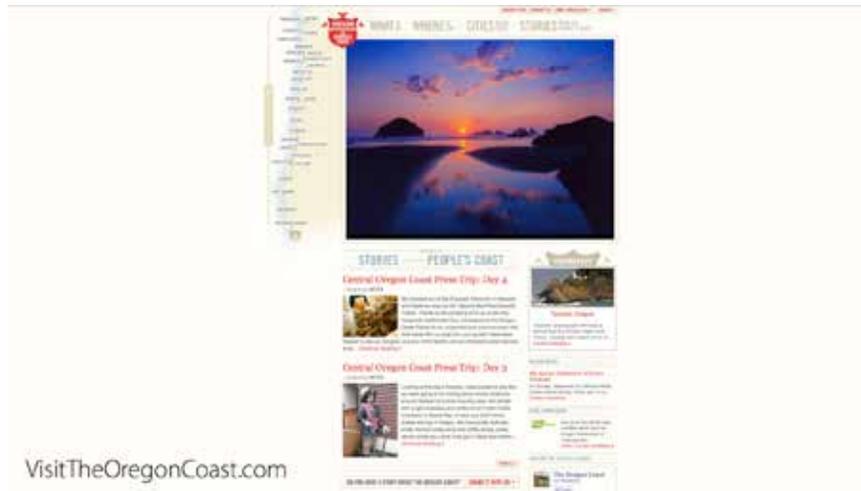
Search engine optimization should include experiences, activities, and opportunities more than just the place. People search for activities first, then

the location.

If you want new business, residents, or visitors, it starts in front of a computer screen.

What to do:

- Develop a tourism-only website for Pella - Consider WordPress or Weebly. They both offer a huge variety of website templates, they are easy to set up, and easy to make edits, changes, and additions.



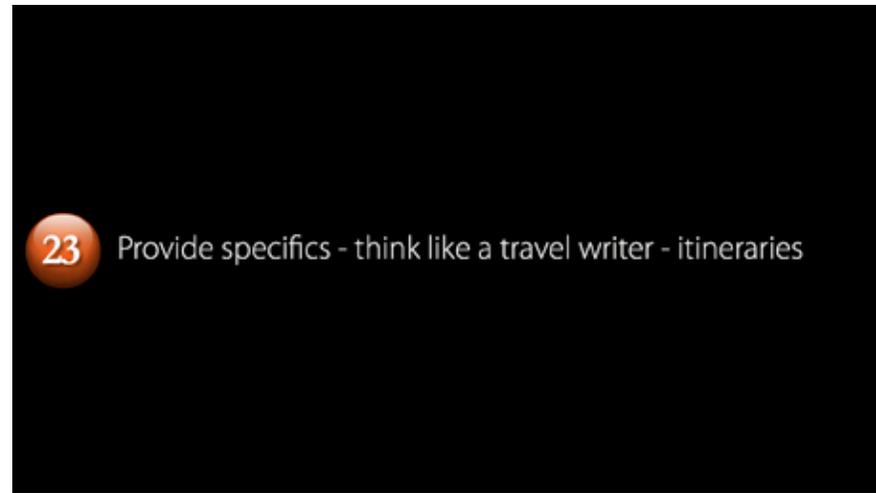
What to do:

Your marketing dollars at work - suggested allocation:

- 45% Internet/website/social media/apps/peer reviews
- 20% Public relations, media - brand building
- 20% Advertising - to drive people to your website
- 10% Collateral materials
- 5% Outdoor, trade shows, other marketing avenues

The world watched 1.46 trillion YouTube videos in 2012 - and it's growing. Make YouTube a priority.

Bottom line - Spend your money on content - not the delivery system. Content is what closes the sale. Marion County, as whole, can become one of Iowa's best destinations - and a year round choice.

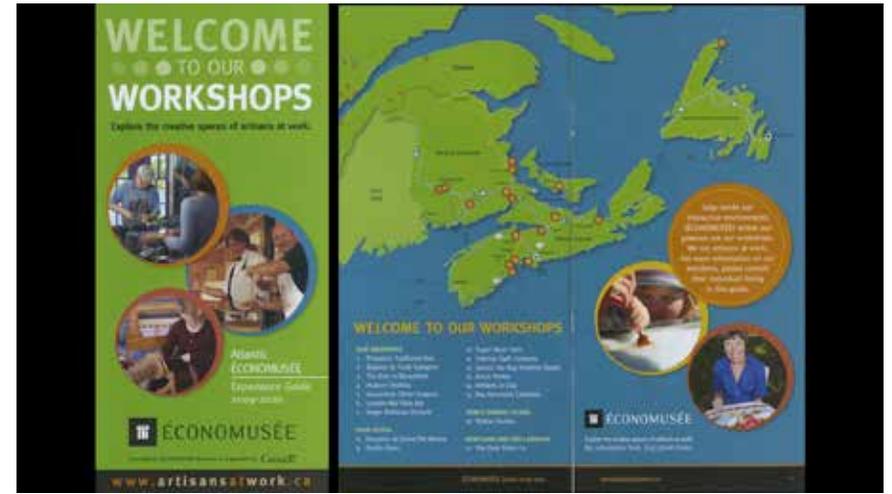
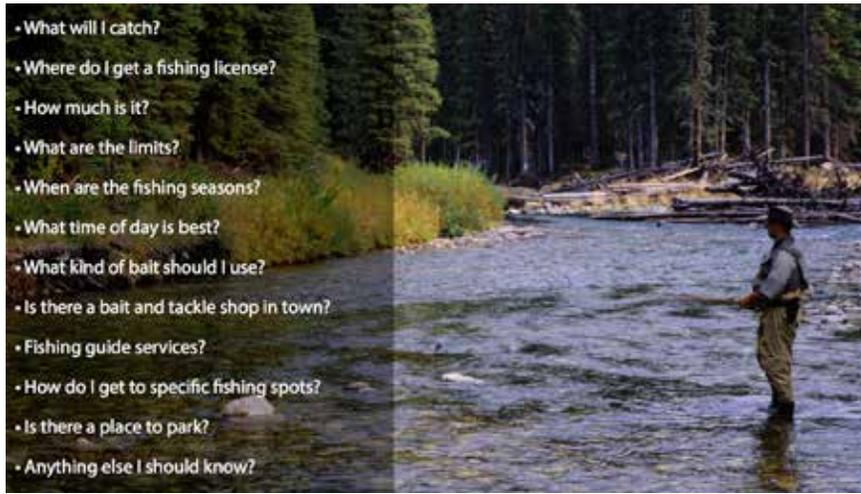


Look at competing websites and other themed community websites. Look at Leavenworth, Washington (Bavarian); Holland, Michigan (Dutch); Solvang, California (Dutch); and others to compare notes. Remember, really sell the experience. Even the website should look like those in Holland. In fact, look at sites for communities IN Holland. The experience starts with your home page.

The easier you make it for people to plan a trip to Marion County, the longer they will stay, and the more likely they will be to return. That means provide very specific information that is easy for people to find and use. On

your website, provide details - what would you need to know to plan a trip, assuming you know nothing about the area. What's the best way to get there? How long does it take? Where can we stay? Where can we find breakfast? Lunch? What fun activities can we do, and how long will they take?

Avoid providing lists. Develop sample itineraries: half day, full day, multi-day. And create them in a format along the lines of "Pick your season" followed by "Pick your passion." Based on their preferences they will see what experiences fit them.



In most of your marketing materials, the biggest missing ingredient is specifics. Specific information and details. Virtually all of your guides, brochures, website, signs and kiosks are too general. Visitors need specifics to plan and enjoy your area, and they're not finding it.

Try to answer the practical questions a visitor would have for each activity, such as the questions top left for fishing.

The Economusee brochure (top right and bottom left) is a good example of

how to provide specifics.

What to do:

- Find local writing talent to have them write up itineraries. Choose a variety of "themed" itineraries: Shopping and dining; family fun; weekend getaways for couples; and more.



Make Public Relations a priority.

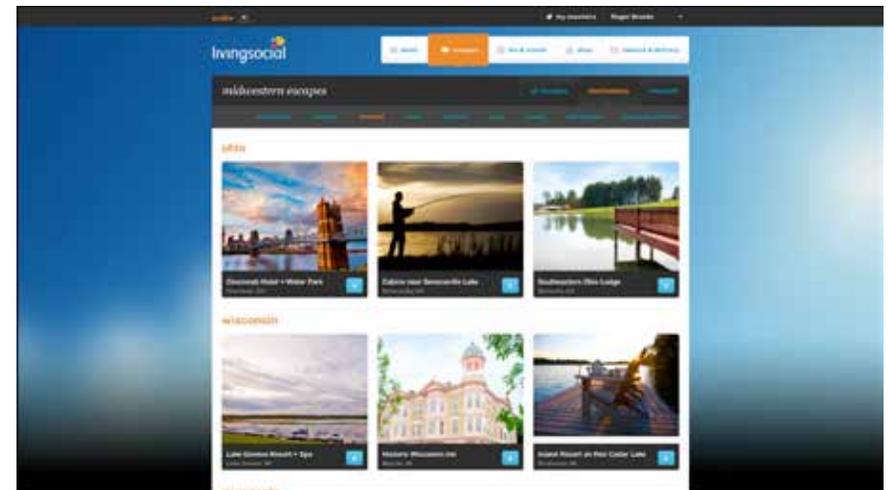
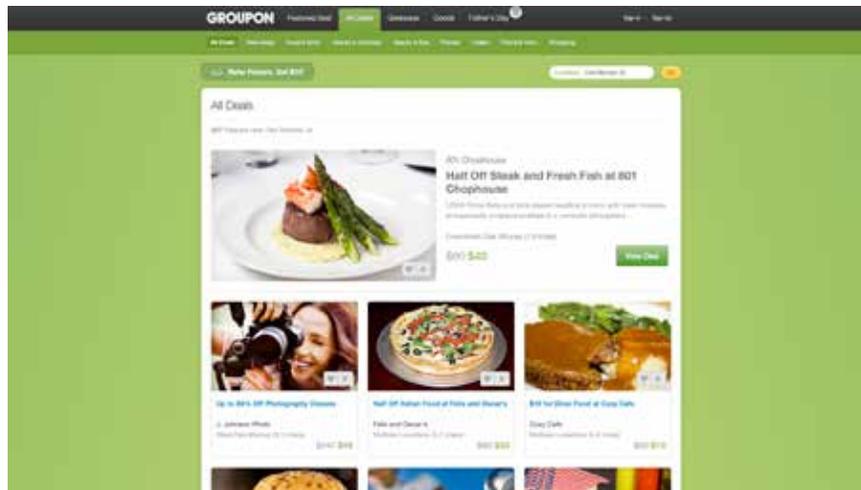
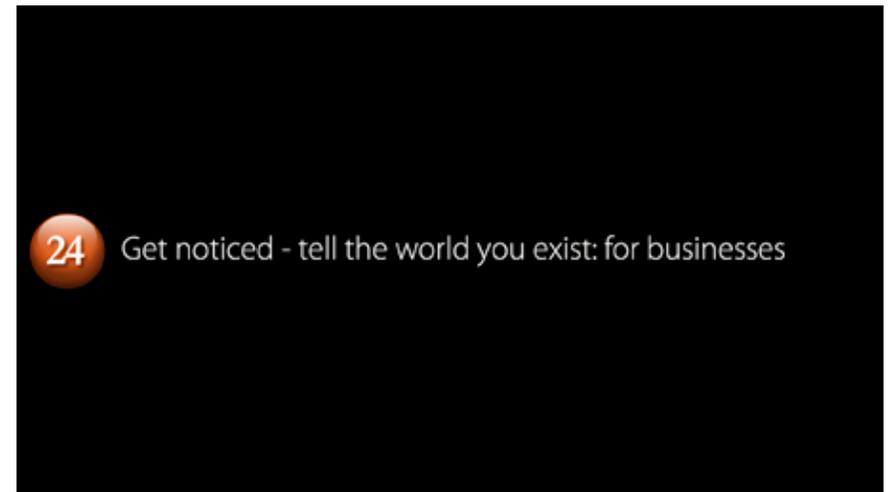
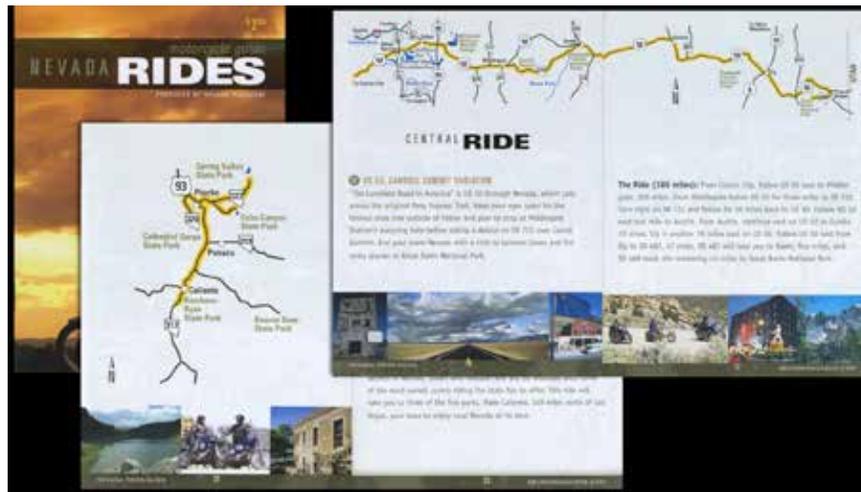
- Articles are read three times more than ads.
- Publicity gives you more credibility than ads.
- You'll see \$3 in earned media for every \$1 you spend on PR.

What to do:

- Make up a database of clubs and organizations.
- Find their publications: their newsletters and magazines.

- Recruit their members to create itineraries and/or have local talent create specific itineraries geared to the clubs' interests.
- Have local talent write articles specifically for these clubs' publications.
- Submit these articles and itineraries to the clubs - they are always on the lookout for new and interesting things for their members to enjoy.

Cost: Nothing - but it does require outreach, editing, and some supplemental photography.



What to do: Create itinerary booklets. Cost: About \$2 each. Distribute at local outlets and enthusiasts' stores.

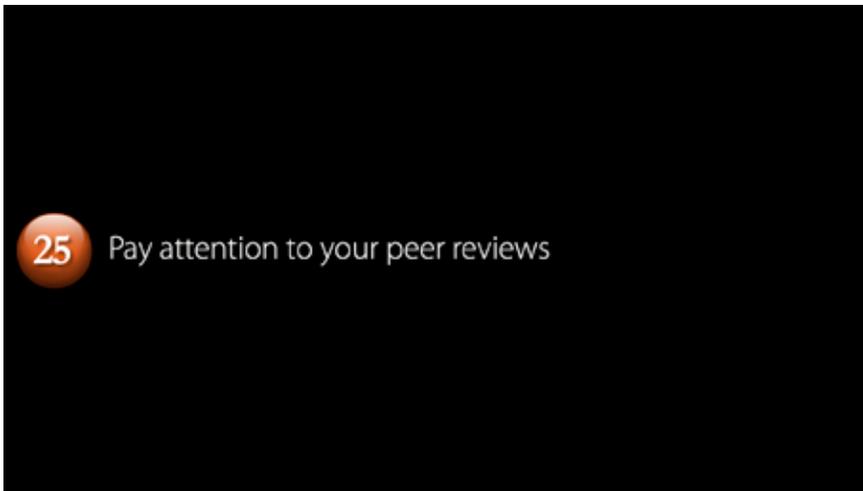
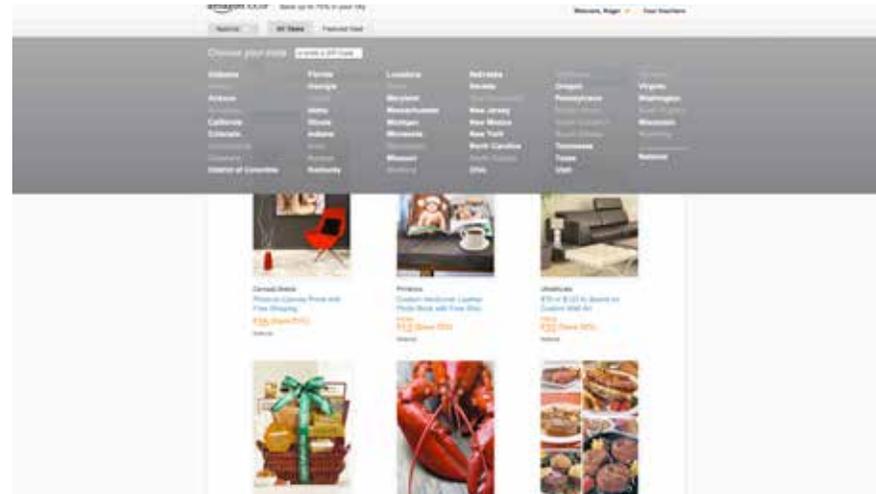
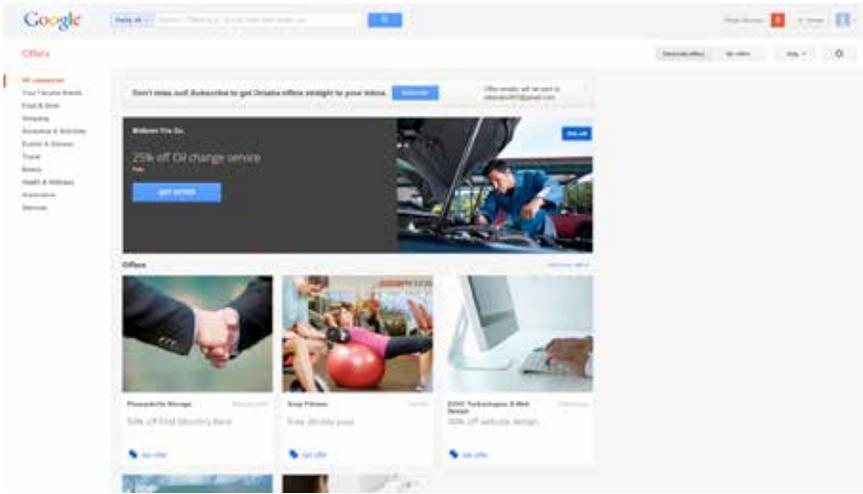
What to do:

- Engage locals in creating "Itineraries from locals." They can include:
- Girls' weekends out
- Kids & family
- Wheels: driving & riding enthusiasts
- On the water

- Fishing & hunting
- Golf
- Farm to table (culinary)
- The romantic escape

For Businesses:

Consider using web-based sales offers, such as Groupon, Living Social, Amazon Local, and Google Offers. It's a great way to get your name out there!



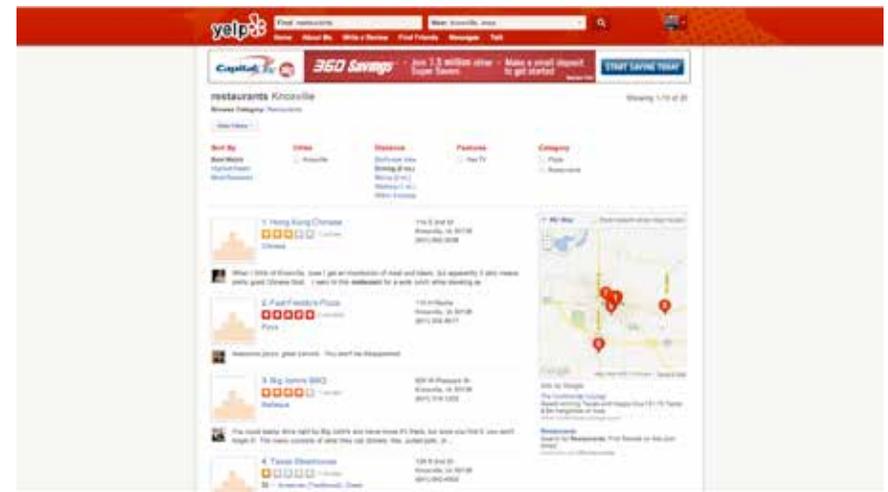
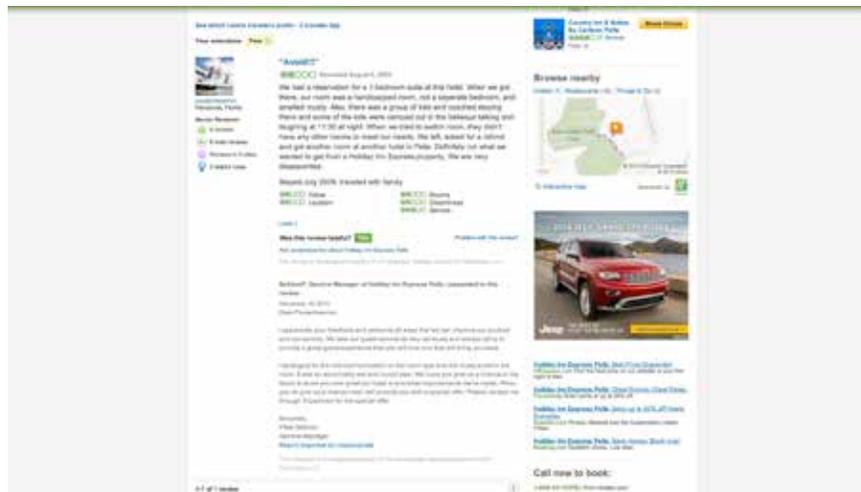
86% of consumers trust peer reviews, but less than 35% trust ads. It pays to pay attention to your peer and customer reviews!

More and more travelers are looking at peer review websites to get information for travel planning. Make sure those visitors can find your businesses and attractions.

Provide the information to peer review sites such as TripAdvisor and Yelp about your locations and businesses. You can set up the information

yourselves - a customer doesn't have to do it, and it'll be much easier for your happy customers to post good reviews.

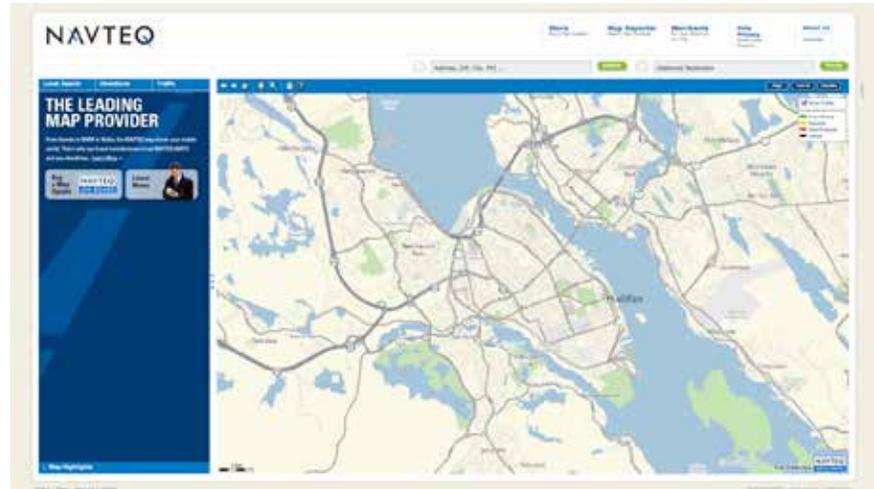
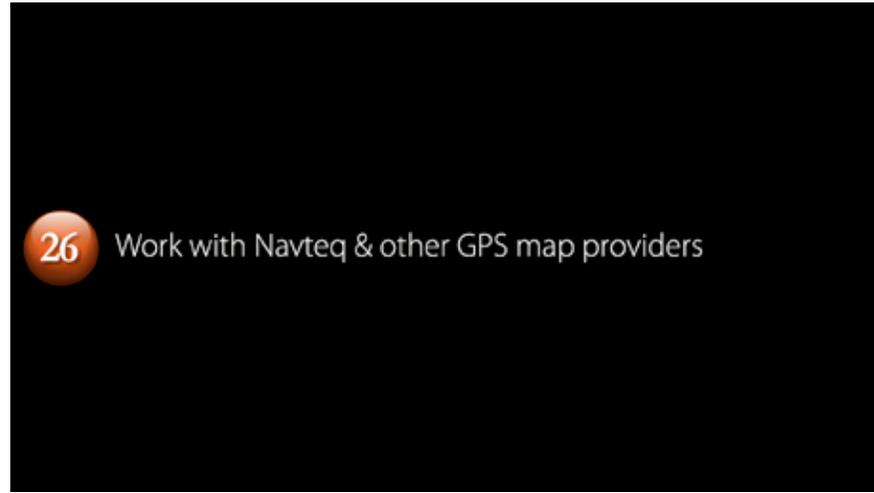
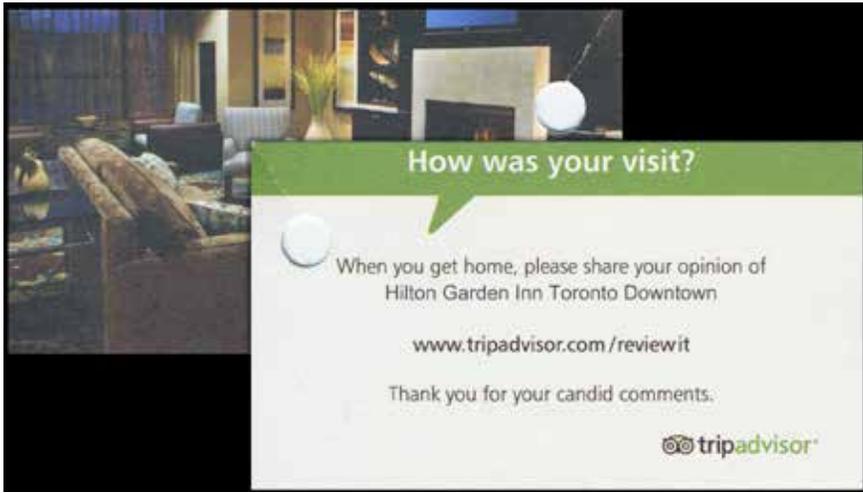
The Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site (bottom right) promotes its standing with TripAdvisor - good peer reviews are an excellent selling point.



Peer reviews are more important than ever before. It's critical that merchants, restaurants, and lodging facilities monitor peer review sites and make a response if necessary. And it costs nothing to reply to a review, but it shows people you care.

Make sure your tourism organizations are adding content to TripAdvisor. It does take time, but it's a free service. The folks at TripAdvisor want to be more than just a review site for restaurants and lodging establishments. They are working hard to become the go-to source for planning a trip to just about

anywhere. They want the site populated with attractions, activities, photos, and resources.



You can encourage your customers to post good reviews by asking them to do so (top left). First, make sure they enjoyed their stay, or their meal, or their activity. If so, hand them a card and ask them to post a review.

More and more travelers are using navigation systems when they travel, so it's important to make sure the information is correct and complete. Make sure all your local businesses are included, and are noted in their proper locations. Work with Navteq to make sure the information is right.

What to do:

- Get volunteers with various units to test locations: lodging, restaurants, shops, attractions.
- Then work with mapping companies on corrections and additions.

Navteq handles the maps for Garmin, Lowrance, NDrive; for web-based applications such as Yahoo! Maps, Bing Maps, Nokia Maps, and Mapquest; and for radio: XM Satellite Radio and Sirius Satellite Radio. Google maps provides its own data. Tele Atlas provides data for TomTom and Apple's IOS 6 "maps."



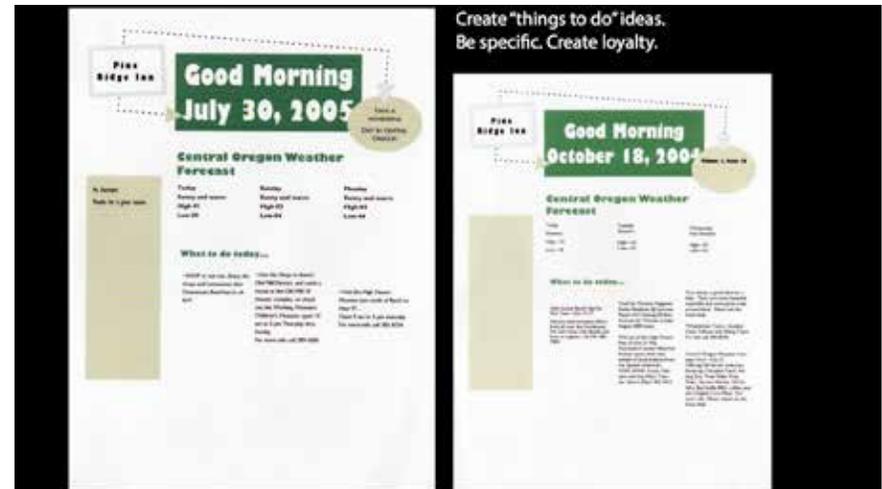
Your "Activities Guide" could be organized as "pick your season; pick your passion."

Suggestions:

- Pick your season: What to expect; Activities; Lodging, dining, shopping.
- Pick your passion: On the water; On the greens (golf); On the road (tour routes, motorcycle, RV, bike); On the trails; In Holland; In the galleries (arts & culture); Hook and bullet (hunting & fishing); Shopping, dining & entertainment; Festivals & events.
- About the area.

Many destinations keep their customers coming back by sending out regular e-newsletters, such as Asheville, NC (bottom right). It creates top of mind awareness. Subscribe to a few and follow their lead.

Create a monthly e-newsletter about the area - events, things going on - real news, no advertising. We suggest using ConstantContact to manage your database and newsletters. Have everyone you know sign up and have their friends sign up. Have sign-up sheets in lodging facilities, shops, and restaurants, and ask customers if they'd like to receive it. Promise that you will not "share" their contact information.



Retailers can create lifelong customers by offering terrific customer service. Some creative efforts can yield great results.

A jewelry shop in Sisters, Oregon (top right) earns about 70% of their sales from AFTER the shoppers leave the store - often several months later. They've created customers for years - or for life.

The jewelry store has a supply of the above cards (bottom left), and if there's something a customer shows an interest in, the salesperson asks if they can

write down the item, and the person takes the card with them. Many of these customers will purchase the item by phone months later - for a birthday or Christmas gift.

A little extra effort can pay off. Generate customer loyalty with extra touches - like this hotel in Bend, Oregon does with its daily newsletters for guests, telling the weather forecast and offering some activity ideas (bottom right).



A Community Brand is much more than a logo or slogan - it's what the community is known for; your niche; what people expect to experience while there.

With so many communities competing for the same people and dollars, it's important to stand out from everyone else - to find your niche and promote it like crazy. If it can fit any other place within your market area, start over!

For Knoxville - What if ...

Knoxville was known for "wheeled sports" - BMX - Motocross - ATV - Snowmobiling - Human powered sports - Leisure biking - Car and motorcycle rallies and shows. Each one of these is a business opportunity. What about offering guided Segway tours of the area or downtown?

Each community needs to find its niche - that one thing that sets you apart from everyone else and makes you worth a special trip.



Decorative crosswalks are an excellent way to help define a theme, separate a district, and increase pedestrian safety at the same time.

The crosswalks shown on this page are stamped into the asphalt - they are not paint. Created by Streetprint™, based in Vancouver, BC, these crosswalks can be done in any design and color, so they're ideal for promoting a town's brand or theme.

Imagine replacing these ordinary crosswalks (top left) with crosswalks that

look like this (top right)? This could fit the wheeled sports brand, should Knoxville decide to go that route. This is, of course, just one idea, but one that leverages the Sprint Car Hall of Fame, which is a great attraction and can draw people year round.



Recruit car shows and events to Knoxville. Solvang, CA (bottom left and right) sent out letters to regional car clubs inviting them to hold their events in their town. The car clubs did the work, while the town rolled out the red carpet for them. The cost? Only about \$200 in mailing costs, stationery, and welcome signs.

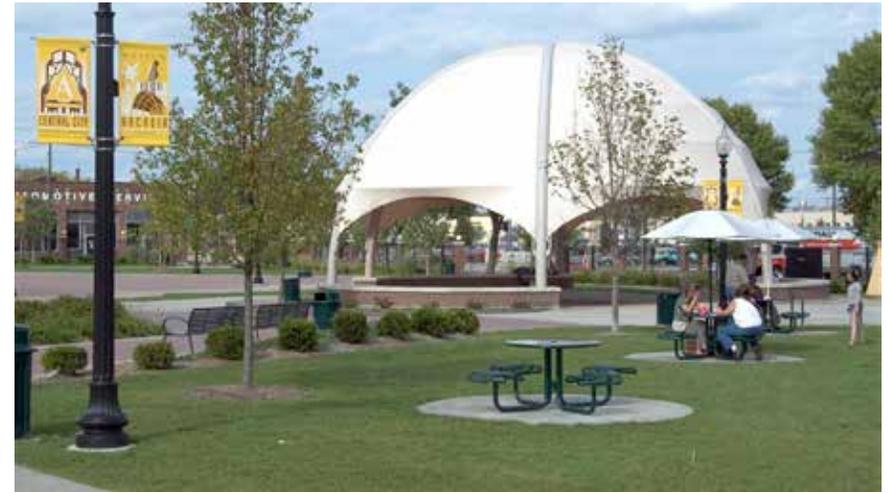
What to do:

- Develop a database of regional clubs and organizations: Auto and motorcycle clubs, bike clubs, other wheeled sport organizations. You can find

National Directories of Nonprofit Organizations at your local library.

- Purchase copies of club/organization newsletters, magazines, publications.
- Reach out to the publishers

Clubs and organizations are looking for interesting places to hold events for their members; they are looking for itineraries and ideas that will cater to their members' interests.



Ice Sailing/Yachting



HydroBike



Developing spaces to hold events will attract more events and people to town. Kalamazoo, MI, has invested in several downtown gathering areas including Arcadia Creek Festival Place (top two photos) - after seeing the success of their first one, they went on to create additional plaza areas. By developing these places, they became popular event venues and now Kalamazoo is a very popular weekend destination for visitors living in both Chicago and Detroit.

Knoxville - Opportunities:

The photos bottom left and right showcase possible business opportunities, activities, and events that could play a role in a Knoxville "transportation" theme should you decide not to go with "wheeled" sports.

The following pages show some additional ideas as well.

What moves you? (Both physically and emotionally)

Hobie Cat sailing



Pumgo



Electric Bicycle



Segway



Additional ideas for business opportunities, activities, and events for a possible Knoxville "transportation" theme. A business in Raleigh, North Carolina has all kinds of human powered sport vehicles, plus Segways and they are a very popular destination for visitors. Imagine a retailer having these vehicles, which they rent out and/or provided guided tours on.

All of these would make Knoxville an incredible destination and many of these activities could take place year round.

Motorcycle Rallies



Road Rallies & car shows



Human Car



Surrey rentals



Here are more and more wild ideas that could be brought into a transportation themed brand. You can host competitions among universities and even high schools for coming up with new and unique ways to move people - physically.

Landsailing (Blokart)



Cyclocross



Trikke



Additional ideas could include:

- Segways
- Solar car exhibitions
- Whirlyball
- Driving simulator
- Train simulator
- Kiteboarding
- Kite buggy

- Zorb
- Segway polo

Imagine building a “park” that would have all kinds of trails or open spaces for various kinds of sports like you see here on this page.



Other notes and first impressions:

- We had a hard time navigating through the parks in the county. The wayfinding was incomplete and confusing. Signs like this (bottom left) were not very helpful. It looks as though the area has been flooded for quite some time.
- The Water Trail interpretive signs were very good and interesting. Perhaps creating a map of these would be a great way to spread your visitors

throughout the county, particularly those interested in the environment.



We saw lots of places that seemed flooded as in both of the photos on the left side of this page.

- I got a kick out of the signage (top right) telling me that no motorized vehicles are allowed beyond this point. So did bicycles make these double wide tracks? It looks as though the ONLY vehicles allowed here are motorized.
- The campgrounds in the county are very nice (bottom right). With visitor information available, perhaps some of these folks would be enticed to spend

time in Pella, Knoxville or Pleasantville.

- I was impressed by the county: there are beautiful vistas, great recreational opportunities, a variety of terrains, and all three towns have incredible opportunities to become among the state's best destinations.



After assessing more than 700 communities, I was actually surprised by Pella and in a very good way. It's an amazing destination that, with a little work and cooperation, could be one of America's "not to be missed" destinations. Stick to the brand and grow it: sidewalk cafes, recruiting businesses from Holland, adding street vendors and musicians, adding theme-oriented events, and keeping the town open into the evening hours.

Knoxville also has the same potential, and its next step should be to create a Brand Development Team of local citizens, driven by the business community,

to start working through the branding process. Once you've chosen the brand direction, the ideas will flow and in a few short years the community will really come to life with new business opportunities, a revitalized downtown, and existing businesses doing better than ever.

The square should have a name other than "the square."



Same here - give it a name! This space should be programmed!



Amazing parks throughout the county!



Giving a gathering space a name helps make it become a stand-alone destination in the minds of visitors, residents, and merchants. "The square" is a place. "Pioneer Square" is a destination. A gathering place.

As you travel down a freeway and see signs for "business district" or even "downtown," does that pull you from the freeway? But if you saw "Pioneer Square - Downtown" you get a feeling that this is a destination, not just another business center. Does Pella have a sister city in Holland? Perhaps the "square" should use their name i.e. Amsterdam Square.

Some popular downtown districts:

- Vancouver, BC: Gastown
- Seattle, WA: Pioneer Square
- San Diego, CA: Gaslamp District
- San Antonio, TX: The Riverwalk
- Denver, CO: Larimer Square
- Boulder, CO: Pearl Street Mall
- Reading, OH: The Bridal District



Use every opportunity to give people a reason to come back. Adding a calendar of events here (bottom right) would be an invitation for visitors to return to the theater. In fact, there should be a calendar of events at the stage in the main square, here near the Royal Amsterdam, and at the theater. The same applies to the Sprint Car Hall of Fame.

ALWAYS give us reasons to come back!



The photos on these pages are simply other wild ideas and initial impressions. This little shop (bottom left) is right across the street from Pella and looks like it would be a great lunchtime cafe with all kinds of outdoor seating during the summer and fall months. A great opportunity. The garage doors could be lifted to offer indoor/outdoor seating and perhaps even include entertainment.

I LOVED the bank (bottom right). Very cute. Promote places like this that reinforce the brand.

Wayfinding would help visitors find great places, like this.



Same here.



Does it get any better than this?



Staff thought this was in the Netherlands.



There were many places I found that would have been missed had I not been doing an assessment of the area. There were great ice cream shops (top two photos), other architectural gems (bottom photos) that reinforce the brand.

As well as this. Amazing. My favorite spot in Pella.



The golf course looks incredible. A great place to own a home as well!



Showing the top photo to associates, all figured this was taken somewhere in Europe. The missing ingredient? People. Plazas like this should be FULL of people year round! This is a great opportunity for additional seating, musicians, a public market or farmers market, or even food vendors - bring it to life!

I did make it to the golf course and saw how beautiful the course is and the homes around the course. Obviously a great place to live!



You have an amazing destination worth a trip from just about everywhere!
It's time to tell the world!

"Forget about all the reasons why something may not work. You only need to find one good reason why it will." - Dr. Robert Anthony

"Many a false step was made by standing still." - Fortune cookie

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only think that ever has." - Margaret Mead

Marion County, Iowa Marketing Assessment

Overview

Looking over the marketing materials for Marion County, the first concern is that there is an enormous amount of materials, but not a consistent message or voice. If a community, even a larger area such as a county, is attempting to attract more visitors, one loud voice will be far more effective than a number of smaller ones. Although the Red Rock area is being partially promoted as a cohesive region with a single message, that message doesn't seem to be consistent.

Marketing Matrix

The Marketing Matrix indicates a few things:

- The only marketing tool used by all the partner organizations is a website – but, only one of them has a mobile website or app.
- Most of the partner organizations utilize a brochure, and the marketing budgets reflect that as well. The need for printed materials has not gone away; however, it has diminished greatly. The vast majority of potential visitors are going to get their information online. Fewer people are relying on brochures and other printed materials. That doesn't mean printing brochures is out for good; but you'll need fewer of them, and a smaller percentage of the marketing budgets should be allocated towards printed materials. Put that money where you will get more bang for your buck.
- Similarly for newspaper and magazine ads – most print advertising is ineffective. That's not to say that there isn't a place for targeted print marketing, but it shouldn't be the primary marketing tool.
- Which begs the question, what should be the primary marketing tool?

Internet marketing and social media. A world-class, professionally developed website, along with a regular presence in social media should be the primary marketing tool for Marion County as a whole and for the individual partner organizations.

Slogans and Taglines

- There is as much disparity in the slogans and taglines as there are printed marketing materials. One change to consider is to create an umbrella brand; something that covers the Red Rock Area as a whole, and then create secondary brands that differentiate the individual communities.
- If your slogan could apply to another community, it is too generic. An easy way to put this to the test is to substitute your community's name for another. For example, the Red Rock area uses "Live your Passion." Could you apply that to other communities? Easily. "Des Moines: Live Your Passion." "Carlisle: Live Your Passion." "Colfax: Live Your Passion." The slogan doesn't tell a potential visitor anything that differentiates your community or area from anyone else. You can "live your passion" in a lot of places. Granted, it may apply more fully to Marion County than it does to the other examples, but the point still remains – it doesn't give you an idea of what makes Marion County unique.
- Pella's slogan, "A Touch of Holland," is more specific, but will only be as effective as it delivers on the promise. Is Pella truly a "touch of Holland?" Are there enough attractions, restaurants, and shopping options that go with the theme to create a themed community?

Red Rock Area website

- The Red Rock Area website has a nice overall look and feel.
- Instead of relying on “marketing by list,” the website should focus on promoting what makes the Red Rock Area unique – the best the area has to offer. While it is helpful to offer search capabilities so people can narrow down their options, it is more effective to show people what makes you worth a special trip. Highlight the best of the best, including text and professional photography. This includes attractions, restaurants, lodging, etc.
- A small change to consider is to include a link to the sample itineraries under “See and Do” as well as under “Visitor Center.” Itineraries are a great way to give potential visitors a taste of what their trip could include, but you want to make sure people can find the information.
- Check the Trip Builder application – it wasn’t working for me (using Internet Explorer)

The Red Rock Area travel guide uses the same “marketing by list” approach as the website. It is more effective to promote the best of the best, rather than list everything that is available. Consider an Activities Guide, which puts the emphasis more on experiences (which is largely what visitors are looking for) and promotes what makes you unique, rather than trying to promote every single business. When you promote what makes you special, the message will reach more of the people you are targeting and all the surrounding businesses will benefit – not just the ones featured in the marketing pieces.

Partner Organization Marketing Pieces

- As stated above, a large number of small voices are less effective than a single, unified voice. However, that doesn’t preclude the need for individual marketing, particularly when it comes to individual attractions, and even communities. The key is to still have consistency in quality, message, and look and feel, while promoting what makes each community or attraction unique.



Contact Us

Roger Brooks International
981 Powell Ave. SW, Suite 125
Renton, Washington 98057

(206) 241-4770
Email: becky@RogerBrooksTeam.com
www.RogerBrooksInternational.com

ROGER BROOKS >
International

Copyright © 2013 Roger Brooks International, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this material may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording, or otherwise without written permission from Roger Brooks International.