



MainStreetNews

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL of THE NATIONAL TRUST'S NATIONAL MAIN STREET CENTER®

Strengthening the Commercial District:

10 TIPS FOR TERRIFIC RETAIL PROMOTIONS

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- 10. **Network Notes**
See how Eureka, Calif., plans to fend off retail glut through an "economic impact" ordinance. Learn all the ways an annual report can benefit your program. See how Terre Haute, Ind., is using religious properties to showcase downtown preservation. And find out how three Midwest communities are reaching out to business owners and the public through lectures and workshops.
- 16. **Smart Growth**
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- 20. **Learning Opportunities**
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BY SHERI STUART

When your Promotion Committee suggests new ideas, how often is the response, "Well, we tried that 10 years ago and it didn't work?" Are there ways to build support and involvement in promotional activities that will not only get people to come see what's happening on your main street, but also boost the bottom line for businesses? The answer is a resounding yes!

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Strengthening the Commercial District: 10 TIPS FOR TERRIFIC RETAIL PROMOTIONS

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A successful promotional strategy must be based on a clear understanding of your district's economic base. With that in hand, you'll be able to identify an appropriate mix of activities that will appeal both to potential customers and participating businesses. As with all promotional campaigns, an adequate lead time is essential to develop ideas, generate support, and market the activity so that it will achieve expected results.

An important point to communicate to business owners is the role Main Street can play in bringing them potential customers. Through promotional activities, Main Street can build foot traffic for the district; however, while it can bring shoppers to the door of a business, once customers cross the threshold, it is up to the merchant to offer the products and services people want. This underscores the necessity of clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of Main Street staff and committees in order to implement activities that will produce the desired outcomes for the district. To help you strengthen your promotional calendar, here are 10 tips, illustrated with local examples from communities across the country.

1 BE STRATEGIC IN SELECTING PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Every commercial district will have its own particular assets and strengths. Main Street's job is to take the wide universe of promotional ideas and identify those strategies that can effectively capitalize on local opportunities. A good example is

Encinitas, California. The Downtown Encinitas Main Street Association (DEMA) decided that one of its

strategies should be to promote its district as the premier cultural and art center for North San Diego County.

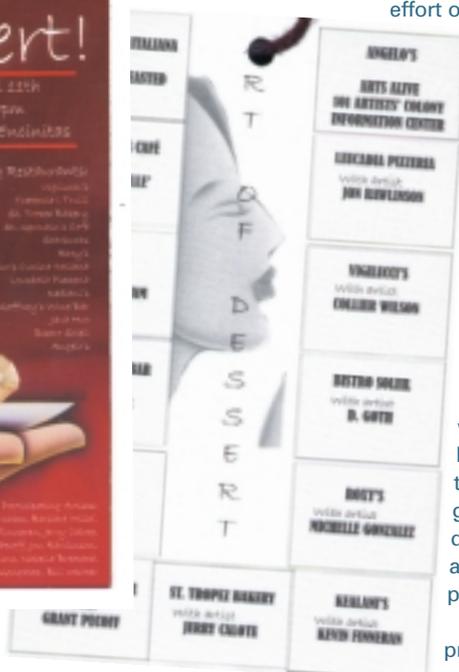
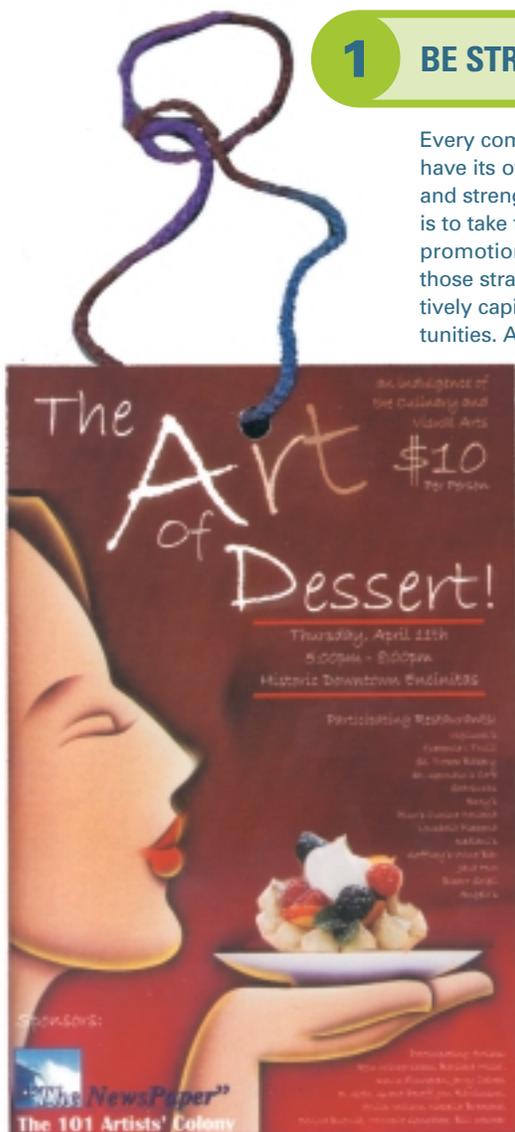
All of the Main Street committees are focused on realizing this vision. The design committee is working on incorporating artistic elements, such as specially designed tree grates and sidewalk medallions showcasing different aspects of the community's heritage, in its streetscape plan. The Arts Alive! banner project is a joint effort of the design and organi-

zation committees; it serves both as a fund raiser for the program and a way to provide the district with artistically designed, seasonal banners. The economic restructuring committee leased a perennially vacant space in the district; working on a shoe string budget, with lots of volunteer labor and the cooperation of a local arts group, the committee developed artist studios and gallery space, complete with a coffee shop. Many of DEMA's promotional efforts are

● ART OF DESSERT

also designed to enhance the arts; the Poinsettia Festival, for example, features more than 400 arts and craft vendors. In this way, promotional efforts support overall economic development downtown, which in turn increases the effectiveness of the events. DEMA also sponsors activities to support specific business niches such as the Art of Dessert described below.

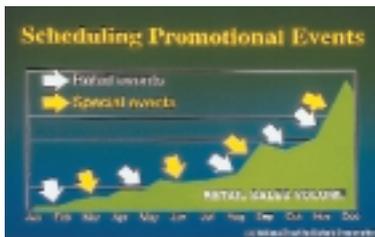
To support the downtown's thriving restaurant cluster and link it to the burgeoning arts niche, the Downtown Encinitas Main Street Association, created the "Art of Dessert." Described as an "indulgence of the culinary and visual arts," the event teams artists with local businesses and features samplings of desserts, art displays, and culinary and artistic demonstrations. For \$10, each participant gets a ticket—a colorful badge on a string—to wear during the event. On the back of the ticket, there is a spot for each participating restaurant to place a stamp, which entitles the ticket-holder to a sample of the featured dessert.



2 COORDINATE ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE PEAK RETAIL SEASONS

Different businesses have peak demands at different times of the year. For example, in the weeks leading up to April 15, demand for accountants is at its highest, while retail traffic may be slower than at other times of the year. The challenge for the Main Street program is to identify prime times for shopping and develop targeted activities during these periods to help build foot traffic. It is much easier to get consumers to buy more when they are already planning specific expenditures. Think Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Back to School, and the holiday season among others—all times of the year when retail sales can be enhanced. Get customers to think of the district first when making seasonal or holiday purchases so that businesses have the opportunity to capture additional dollars before shoppers leave town. A series of promotions will need to be designed for different business clusters throughout the year. Gathering sales data from businesses will help identify the appropriate time of year to implement specific types of promotions.

Start with the holiday season; it's almost always a good bet to build retail traffic. Main Street districts have implemented activities ranging from extended shopping hours to merchants' holiday open houses with great success. A recent trend among Main Street communities is to link purchases with specific reward programs. Consider the following examples from Monahans, Texas and Batesville, Arkansas.



“SHOP MONAHANS FIRST” HOLIDAY AUCTION

Designed to reward the hometown shopper, “Shop Monahans First” is a joint promotion organized by Monahans Main Street and the Monahans Chamber of Commerce. While it requires a great deal of work, the promotion is a terrific way to expand the downtown's customer base. Simply put, the promotion asks shoppers to save sales receipts from local businesses for a specified period of time. These receipts are then redeemed for vouchers that let customers bid on donated items at a live auction.

In 2001, Monahans' sales tax revenue increased \$35,483.83 over the same three months during the previous year.

The first year the event was held, 53 merchants donated 79 items; \$112,000 dollars in receipts were redeemed for vouchers and more than \$94,000 was bid at the two-and-half-hour auction.

To build interest in the activity, Main Street and the Chamber sent letters explaining the promotion to all of their members. Because of the complexity of the activity, organizers found they needed to visit each business to explain how the promotion would work. The groups felt it was very important to get all businesses involved, especially the grocery stores because groceries are a major expenditure for most people.

The time period for saving receipts (which had to show the date and name of store) from participating merchants ran from early October to early December. To participate, each business had to donate one or more items to the auction, which was held in early December. To encourage large-ticket donations, organizers established different levels of participation. (e.g., Platinum

\$100 and above, Gold \$75 to \$99.99, Silver \$50 to \$74.99, Bronze \$25 to \$49.99). Platinum level contributors received top billing on all advertising.

To promote the event, the radio and local newspaper ran specially priced ads for the participating merchants. In addition, the Chamber, Main Street, *Monahans News*, and KLBO radio each contributed \$125 to help with advertising. “Shop Monahans” signs were put on whiskey barrels and given to storeowners to put in their front windows so people would know who was participating. Merchants were encouraged to talk up the event to everyone who came in their stores.

Receipts were redeemed during the week before the auction. Shoppers took their receipts to the Chamber to be added up, verified, and listed on a spreadsheet in alphabetical order. No receipts were redeemed at the auction. Each participant was given a postcard that had the amount redeemed on front, along with the signatures of the Main Street and Chamber executive directors, and a listing of the sponsors on the back—Platinum listed first, of course!

BATESVILLE'S CHRISTMAS CASH

The Downtown Batesville Christmas Cash promotion was created last year to encourage customers to shop downtown. Christmas Cash can be spent as if it were real money. For every two dollars spent at a participating business, a customer receives one ticket to be entered in a drawing for at least \$200 of Downtown Batesville Christmas Cash. However, no purchase is necessary to get one

ticket per day (due to state lottery prohibitions).

Winners are announced during a live radio broadcast at 7:30 a.m., Monday through Friday, in December. Customers begin collecting tickets in November, with daily drawings leading up to Christmas. Winners have until 8 p.m. that day to claim their Christmas Cash. If the cash is not claimed, the money rolls over to the very last drawing during which tickets are drawn until there is a winner. Last year, there were only three days that the money was not claimed and rolled over to the last drawing.



Daily drawings of at least \$200 of “Downtown Batesville Christmas Cash” reward customers who shop at main street businesses.

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3 RECOGNIZE AND REWARD CURRENT AND POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS

It seems as if you can't find a business today that doesn't have some sort of frequent shopper program to generate customer loyalty. Grocery chains, such as Safeway and Albertson's, have "member" card programs that offer specific discounts; coffee houses have "coffee club" cards; department stores have "pantyhose clubs"; even Hallmark has a benefit program to reward frequent buyers. Main Street businesses can take advantage of this type of promotion, either as individual businesses or through district-wide activities such as the program in Dundee, Illinois. In addition, Main Street can attract potential customers by strategically marketing to major employers and key industries through recognition programs, similar to the customized gift certificate program created by Washington, Missouri.

DUNDEE FREQUENT SHOPPER CARD

To support local businesses, Dundee Main Street created

a frequent shopper program. When they make purchases at a participating businesses, customers present a frequent

shopper card, which is stamped to verify the purchase. After five purchases, the card can be presented at one of the participating businesses for a discount. Shoppers who complete the information on the card and return it to the business where the discount was received are eligible for a quarterly "Customer Appreciation Drawing" for a \$100 gift certificate. This information helped the program create a database of frequent shoppers to target for future promotions.

CUSTOMIZED RECOGNITION CERTIFICATES

Downtown Washington, Inc., will customize downtown gift certificates for individuals or businesses to recognize holidays, milestones, or achievements. Individuals or businesses can sign up online for certificates and specify the desired theme (e.g., specific accomplishment such as safe worker award, holiday such as administrative professional's week, etc.). Produced in-house, each certificate has a listing of participating businesses on the back.

4 MAKE SHOPPING DOWNTOWN ENTERTAINING AND INVITING

The promotion and economic restructuring committees should work together to help local businesses improve the shopping experience by creating a pleasing and welcoming environment. Having beverages or cookies on hand, allowing customers to use restrooms, designating a small play area for children, or putting chairs out so people can rest are some quick and easy ways to make customers feel more comfortable. At Dragonwings Bookstore in Waupaca, Wisconsin, for example, the owners have created an environment especially for young people. In a special reading area for pre-teens, a bubbling waterfall splashes down moss-covered rocks. The store's centerpiece is a treehouse carved from a cottonwood tree by local artist Bill McKee; kids are invited to explore the treehouse inside and out or just use it as a quiet place to read. The store also provides special services, such as one-on-one tutoring programs for young children.

Supplement the business sector's effort by creating promotional strategies that add an element of excitement and entertainment and move people throughout the district. Activities can be designed to specifically pull people into participating businesses—Belleville's "Murder Mystery on Main" or Frankfort's "Chocolate Lover's Fantasy," for example—or they can be designed to build foot traffic, such as Montrose's "Main in Motion" or Benicia's "First on Friday" events.



MURDER MYSTERY ON MAIN

In the Illinois town of Belleville, the Main Street program hosted a "Who Done It?" set in downtown businesses. The murder mystery started off with a visit to the "crime scene" at the Main Street office, where participants viewed the "victim" and the evidence left behind by the "murderer." The sleuths were then given a list of stores where witnesses and suspects could be interviewed; to win, they had to interview at least 90 percent of the characters within a designated time period and fill out a fact sheet correctly identifying the culprit and the weapon. The first person to solve the mystery received a cash award; the event also included a random drawing for gifts.

CHOCOLATE LOVER'S FANTASY

"Chocolate Lover's Fantasy" in Frankfort, Illinois, is like a chocolate "trick or treat" for grown-ups. A limited number of \$10 tickets are sold to participants who enjoy tasty



Dragonwings Bookstore in Waupaca, Wis., has created a special reading area for children (above and left below). Kids can sit by a bubbling waterfall that spills over moss-covered rocks.

chocolate treats and an extended evening of shopping at 24 participating businesses that stay open until 9:30 p.m. The event kicks off at the Main Street office where chocolate lovers receive a decorated bag and a map of participating businesses. Merchants are encouraged to offer in-store "sweet deals" and decorate their shops in holiday finery as a preview to the Christmas season.

● MAIN IN MOTION: HISTORY AND HAPPENINGS WITH A HOMETOWN FLAIRE

An idea sparked by local business owners, “Main in Motion: History and Happenings with a Hometown Flaire,” is intended literally to move people into and around the main street area of downtown Montrose, Colorado. Venues featuring performers, interactive artists, the visual arts, and musicians stretch over a 12-block area. Retailers cooperate by extending their hours. According to Lu Anne Tyrrell, director of Historic Montrose, “community members termed the event Miracle on Main due to the



groundswell of attention generated for the district.”

The promotion not only enhanced the bottom line for participating businesses, but also created confidence among merchants that they could pull together for the same mission. The series was funded through business contributions and a mini-grant from the Montrose Area Merchants Association.

● FIRST FRIDAY ON FIRST

Benicia Main Street created “First Friday on First” to promote the downtown district, encourage businesses to stay open late, and bring residents of the California community downtown in the evening. The event is promoted through a cooperative advertisement by the stores that stay open. The City of Benicia supports the event and hosts an outdoor movie at dusk. Other activities have included demonstrations and lessons by a swing dance club and a car show. Main Street also sponsors three musical groups that perform in different locations in the district. The program has steered away

from arts and crafts and food booths on the street to encourage people to visit the stores and restaurants in the district.



In Benicia, Calif., an outdoor movie—with popcorn, of course!—brings young people downtown on a Friday evening.

5 DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS

Think outside the box when identifying potential partnerships that will help market the commercial district.

Opportunities for joint marketing efforts exist both within the community, through local tourism and business organizations, for example, and outside the community with fellow Main Street towns or statewide organizations.

A few years ago, several Main Street communities in Oklahoma (Ada, Ardmore, Duncan, Durant, Pauls Valley, Sulphur, and Wynnewood) joined together to publish regional brochures twice a year to promote each town’s events. The goal was to cross-promote events throughout the region and send shoppers to Main Street towns. Brochures were distributed by each program and by state travel centers. As the following examples exhibit, partnerships can be formed on a statewide basis, with the private sector, or with other local programs that have similar goals.

This travel planner promotes Illinois Main Street communities through photos, descriptions of activities, and maps.

● HISTORIC MAIN STREETS OF ILLINOIS

A group of Main Street communities in Illinois formed the independent Illinois Council of Main Street Communities (ICMC) initially to produce a travel brochure and now, in the absence of a statewide program, as an organizing mechanism for local programs. The culmination of a two-year effort, the travel planner promotes Main Street towns through a one-page description and photo of each community and a listing of the town’s attractions, festivals,



and lodging. Also included are several pages of regional maps and suggested travel itineraries. ICMC printed 150,000 brochures, which are distributed through 15 Illinois Tourist Information Centers.

Funding for the project included \$38,000 from a state tourism grant, \$10,000 from Holiday Inn, \$2,000 from Grand Victoria Casino, and a \$750 contribution from each community. The brochures are also advertised through ads in *AAA Home and Away Magazine*, *Midwest Living*, and *Illinois Weekend Escapes*.

● KROGER-MAIN STREET MANSFIELD PARTNERSHIP

Kroger and Company, one of the country’s largest retail grocery chains, and Main Street Mansfield teamed up to promote the Ohio community’s downtown shopping district. For 12 weeks, three area Kroger stores distributed flyers promoting 20 downtown businesses. By showing their

Kroger Plus Card when making a purchase at any of these main street businesses, shoppers could take advantage of the unique discounts and sales described in the flyers.

Kroger Plus Card shoppers could also register for a sweepstakes drawing that offered prizes ranging from a stay at the downtown Holiday Inn to gift baskets and gift certificates from participating Main Street Mansfield merchants.

The idea for the joint promotion originated with Main Street Mansfield, which followed it up with the help of a committee member who knew a Kroger employee and thus was able to make the introduction for the program. The grocery store was looking for ways to enhance its Kroger Plus Card shopper benefits as well as strengthen its ties to the community.

Calling the partnership a great opportunity for “downtown businesses to connect with area shoppers,” Jennifer Gerberick, executive director of Main Street Mansfield notes that “downtown Mansfield has so much to offer and this promotion will help to get the word out to those who haven’t yet discovered all that is happening here.”

10 TIPS FOR TERRIFIC RETAIL PROMOTIONS

“It’s a grand opportunity to promote shopping in the downtown area,” adds Burton Stahl, marketing director for Main Street Mansfield. “The collaboration with Main Street Mansfield is Kroger’s first such promotion with a downtown association, and we are proud to have been chosen to pilot this program.”

CHARMING CHAIRS

The Downtown St. Charles Partnership (DSCP), in cooperation with the St Charles Convention and Visitors Bureau, created the “Charming Chairs” promotion to draw both local and visitor traffic into the historic Illinois town. Local businesses purchased unadorned chairs from DSCP for \$90 (resident and non-profit price was \$50) and then used their talent and creativity to decorate the chairs. Two types

of chairs were available, one with an open seat to accommodate an eight-inch plant container and the other with a full seat. The goal was to build traffic downtown during the summer.



The Southwest Trading Company, a downtown anchor that just celebrated its 25th year in business, created the “Spirit of the Southwest.” Displayed in the store’s front window, the chair attracted a lot of attention for the business. A relatively new Mexican restaurant, Miguel’s on the Fox, designed a whimsical



character taking a siesta, which has become a permanent fixture in front of the business. The owner has received calls asking if he is “the restaurant with the chair”—not bad advertising for a town with more than one Mexican-style restaurant.

The event was promoted through coverage in local papers and a brochure listing every place a visitor or resident could view a chair. The brochure was distributed during the months of July and August and additional copies were printed as needed to ensure a constant supply. Stores were able to sell the chairs at the conclusion of the event to recoup their costs.

The “Charming Chairs” created by Miguel’s (far left) and the Southwest Trading Company (left) have drawn both local and out-of-town customers to these downtown businesses in St. Charles, Ill.

6 CREATE INSPIRED SIDEWALK SALES TO ENHANCE THEIR APPEAL

With the decrease in the number of retail businesses, sidewalk sales have lost their drawing power in many Main Street communities. Yet the remaining merchants continue to exhibit interest in hosting these types of events. The challenge is to fill the gaps in the retail landscape with activities and programs that will draw people throughout the district. It’s also necessary to work with retailers to effectively merchandise both discounted and non-discounted items during the event.

Identify ways for non-retail businesses to participate, either by hosting a non-profit organization, sponsoring an activity like a chalk art contest, or setting up a booth to distribute information and offer free giveaways—such as an insurance agent giving out root-beer floats or a dentist handing out toothbrushes and floss. These activities can generate traffic in between businesses that are offering merchandise for sale. The theme of the event can be the organizing factor and the element that revives a tired sidewalk sale, as demonstrated in the following examples from St. Charles, Illinois, and Manassas, Virginia.

The “Serendipity and Sidewalk Sale” in downtown St. Charles, Ill., combines educational and entertaining activities with a sidewalk sale to showcase downtown’s unique offerings.



SERENDIPITY AND SIDEWALK SALE

Serendipity is a happy accident—something wonderful that you didn’t expect to find. The Downtown St. Charles Partnership used this theme for a retail event that not only featured a sidewalk sale, but also encouraged businesses to organize educational and entertaining activities to show visitors what downtown has to offer. A bookstore, for example, combined music and literature based on *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin* in anticipation of the release of a movie based on the book. A historic landmark, the Dearborn House, hosted an old-fashioned lawn and croquet party, with proprietors of the gift shop dressed in period costume. Other stores featured artists practicing their crafts and answering questions.

VICTORIAN SIDEWALK SALE

Historic Manassas, Inc., hosts an annual Sidewalk Sale each September in the Old Town Manassas historic district. It was started about four years ago when one of the district’s merchants got the idea while vacationing in another Main Street town during its sidewalk sale.

Since Old Town is a turn-of-the-century district, the event has a Victorian Era theme. Merchants and volunteers dress in Victorian clothing and set up tables with merchandise on the sidewalks in front of stores. This past September, 95 percent of the district’s businesses participated, with a steady attendance throughout the day. Sales were fabulous and some of the merchants said they couldn’t keep items out long enough because they were going like hot cakes! Balloons, flowers, and antique cars complemented the sale.

7 INCLUDE KID-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

Don't forget future shoppers when planning activities for the district. Create an unforgettable day for children by adding specific activities just for them. One example is to hold a kid's day at the Farmers' Market and ask children to bring anything they have made, baked, or grown; during sidewalk sales, kids could partner with a local business to sell items they have made or interview a local business owner and develop an ad for that business. Creating these positive experiences will help build long-term commitment for the commercial district and enhance the sense of community. The following example from Newkirk, Oklahoma, shows how a kid-oriented activity can have positive impacts on businesses in particular and the community overall.

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS SHOP

Newkirk Main Street started a Children's Christmas Shop in 1996. Of the approximately 300 Newkirk elementary and middle school children, about 130 attend the shop. Main Street provides a place for the merchants who price their items and set them up any way they want. The day of the shop, parents bring their children and sign them in. The children cannot leave until their parents pick them up and sign them out. Nor are parents allowed to come into the Christmas Shop; instead, they are encouraged to shop down-

town. Any parent who shops downtown and brings back a cash register receipt for \$10 or more is entered into a drawing for Main Street dollars.

Main Street has two volunteers who dress as elves and go to the school with flyers the Friday before the event (which is always held on the second Saturday in December); the event is also promoted through public service ads on TV, radio, and in the newspaper.

All items for the shop must be priced in even dollar increments and must be \$10 or less. Each business must also have its name on the tag to help those recording the sales. Merchants are responsible for



Children in Newkirk, Okla., spend the day playing and purchasing gifts in the Christmas Shop while their parents shop downtown.

adding sales tax. All funds from the day go to the merchants. The kids love it, the parents like it, and the merchants think it's terrific. The shop not only keeps money in the community; it also gives the children a real feeling of independence—a win-win situation for all involved.



8 CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO EDUCATE CUSTOMERS ABOUT GOODS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE ON MAIN STREET



Main Street programs tend to rely on business directories or web site listings to inform people about the range of goods and services available in the commercial district. While both are important, useful tools, other opportunities need to be explored. Both in-store and coordinated district-wide activities can educate customers about the range of goods available as well as provide ideas on how to use specific products. For example, cooking supply

stores frequently offer recipes or tips on how to use specialty products or provide in-store cooking demonstrations; bookstores often put together "staff recommendations" or organize reading groups; and floral shops give flower arranging or gift basket demonstrations.

Complementary business clusters—businesses that sell related products and services—can work together to create seasonal promotions. Typical of this type of cross-promotion

would be a spring bridal fair that coordinates a fashion show of bridal wear and displays from bakeries, jewelry shops, florists, printers, wedding planners, etc. Or, a district might have strong competitive or comparison clusters—businesses that sell similar products—such as antiques or clothing or financial services.

Main Street needs to identify the types of business clusters that exist based on data collected as part of a market analysis

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and then create specific promotions to educate consumers about particular strengths of the district—whether an auto care cluster or a home improvement cluster. To expose the general community to the full range of goods and services available, Main Street needs to craft specific activities, such as the Cocoa Beach, Florida, Wednesday-Friendsday Business Expo, that will reinforce assets of the district.

● WEDNESDAY-FRIENDSDAY BUSINESS EXPO

Since 1982, the Cocoa Beach Area Chamber of Commerce has sponsored a Wednesday-Friendsday networking event on the first Wednesday of each month; each event has a different host. Cocoa Beach Main Street hosts one Wednesday each year to expose community and business leaders to Cocoa Village. This year, 450 people attended Main Street's tabletop expo, which included a competi-

tion among Cocoa Beach restaurants for "best food" and among businesses and candidates for "best merchandising" of their business or campaign. Entertainment included a Barbershop Quartet and a walking tour of historic sites. Participating businesses paid a \$45 fee per table; food providers exhibited for free.

A specialty food shop can educate customers by holding taste testings that show shoppers how to use its products.



9 HELP BUSINESSES TIE INTO MAJOR SPECIAL EVENTS

Special events are designed to create a sense of liveliness in the district, build community, de-emphasize commercial aspects, and provide a safe, inviting atmosphere for people to have fun. With large events, however, Main Street needs to work with downtown businesses to help them tap into the buying potential created by attracting larger crowds to the district. One way is to help businesses spotlight their products or services in a manner compatible with the event. For example, if there is a music and audio equipment store in an area of the district where musical entertainment is not scheduled, ask the owner to set up speakers outside and play music that reflects the event's theme. Or get the owner of a bookstore to have costumed characters of popular children's stories on hand—guaranteed to bring parents and kids into the store! Ask businesses to provide refreshments or open their restrooms. While some folks may just pass through, others might take the opportunity to shop and visit with store owners.

● WENATCHEE'S WASHINGTON APPLE HARVEST FESTIVAL

Beginning in 2000, Wenatchee, Washington, created the day-long Washington Apple Harvest Festival, to be held the last Saturday each September, to increase awareness of the Wenatchee Valley and the Washington apple industry. Co-sponsored by the Wenatchee Downtown Association, the Wenatchee Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Washington Apple Commission, and the North Central Washington Museum, this multi-venue event stretches throughout the downtown area, incorporating two parks, several

parking lots, and all the businesses in between. Activities include the exciting Tree Top Apple Bin Rally where teams of contestants race carts constructed of apple bins, an apple dessert contest, music, Valentine's famous performing pigs, apple-tasting and educational seminars, and heritage exhibits. Merchants help plan the event and host a variety of activities, such as the downtown quilt walk and drawing, "apple snap" family photos courtesy of a local camera store, and a barbecue provided by a local restaurant.



Caption here



Washington Apple Harvest Festival, Wenatchee, Wash.

10 RATHER THAN DISCOUNTS, CONSIDER "VALUE-ADDED" PROMOTIONS

While sales are valid promotional activities for a Main Street district, consider limiting the number to two or three per year so that the district's image does not become synonymous with "bargain basement" prices. Instead, promote a quality image by developing "value-added" activities. Think of the way cosmetics areas in department stores seasonally distribute "gifts" with a purchase. In Main Street districts, it might mean organizing a bulk purchase of inexpensive, custom ornaments to distribute with purchases during a Merchant's Holiday Open House or perhaps giving out flowers on Mother's Day.



DEATH BY CHOCOLATE WEEKEND

In Libertyville, Illinois, the Main Street program organized a "Death by Chocolate" business promotion for Valentine's Day. Downtown businesses distributed complimentary chocolates to their customers. Store visitors also registered for a special Death by Chocolate gift basket, filled with heart-stopping confections and gift certificates totaling \$450. In all, 14 businesses participated.

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WHY PROMOTIONS?

Stores have promotions rather than sales to accomplish a variety of purposes. The days of twice-a-year clearance sales are a thing of the past. Today's retailer knows that the way to get and keep good customers is to constantly provide them with new and different promotions and opportunities to save time and money. Shopping must be entertaining, fun, and innovative. According to business consultant T.J. Reid, businesses should look at the following objectives when designing a promotional strategy:

- ❖ **Increase sales, stock turn, and clear out merchandise for new arrivals.** End-of-the-season, semi-annual clearance sales have always been the retailer's way of cleaning house. As recessions forced department stores and others to hold more and more sales, clearance sales were no longer enough to keep inventory fresh and/or stock balanced.
- ❖ **Reward present customers and strengthen relationships with them.** Most promotional invitations are sent to regular customers. It's the store owner's way of saying "Thank You for your loyalty."
- ❖ **Attract new and different customers.** New people will notice your store through newspaper ads

and alternative advertising, such as Welcome Wagon or Yellow Page ads. Buy lists or trade with other merchants. Constantly network to find new customers.

- ❖ **Distinguish your store from the competition.** Everyone in town may have the latest trendy item, but you can present yours in a unique and unusual way. Develop your own theme and personality—be creative, be different.
- ❖ **Promote and establish your image.** Make promotions match your image. Are you family oriented? Hold a mother/daughter event. Bookstore? Offer special readings. Coffee shop/tea room? Prepare and serve special delights

or create event menus. Florist? Design and create baskets—offer classes.

- ❖ **Sell your regular-price merchandise.** Promotions can sell regular-price products as well as sales items. Remember to coordinate the old with the new—the marked down with the newly arrived. Offer layaway on the new items to encourage customers on a budget.

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CASE STUDY: ROCHESTER, MICHIGAN

CRAFTING A COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING PLAN IN DOWNTOWN ROCHESTER

By Kristi Trevarrow



Through the use of gift certificates, stores in downtown Rochester attract customers during the summer weekend event, "Dancin' in the Streets" (below).

In Downtown Rochester, we recognized a long time ago that special events were not going to be enough to sustain a viable promotional program. Special events are great traffic builders, but do they really drive sales? With that in mind, we created a comprehensive marketing plan that includes several special events, each of which features a retail element designed to generate both sales and traffic. In addition to these special events, we have also created an annual advertising campaign utilizing print, radio, television, and direct mail to ensure that Downtown Rochester has top-of-mind awareness within our trade area.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Every January, we hold the "No Ordinary Sale & Ice Sculpture Show." This event was our solution to the question "How do you get people to shop downtown in the dead



of winter in Michigan?" We needed to create an event that would not only draw people downtown, but also ring the cash registers.

During the "No Ordinary Sale," merchants offer special sales on items that never go on sale, spring trunk shows, refreshments, product demonstrations, and more. We promote the sale by putting together a newsletter that lists all of the merchants and their special events. There is no cost for merchants to participate; they just need to write the copy. We handle produc-

tion of the newsletter, which is inserted into our local newspaper and distributed at key locations throughout the downtown. To encourage the customers to wander through the downtown, merchants can purchase ice sculptures which are placed in front of their businesses. Typically, we have approximately 50 sculptures. Overall, this event has become one of our signature events and has become one of downtown's busiest weekends of the year.

In August, we hold "Dancin' in the Street," a weekend event with live music, children's entertainment, a taste fest, and a classic car show. The car show takes place on Sunday, a day when most of our downtown stores are closed. Thus, while we knew that we had the foot traffic, we needed to find a way to get stores to open up on Sunday. To that end, we created the "Shopping Road Rally" and produced a brochure listing all of the stores that agreed to be open. Customers could take the Road Rally brochure and visit each store where they were given a sticker validating their visit. After visiting 12 stores, they could return the completed Road Rally Brochure to the Dancin' in the Street Information Booth and be entered to win one of 40 \$25 Gift Certificates, donated by the participating stores.

Not only is the event a strong sales day, it also provides us with a mailing list for future events and gives the merchants an opportunity for later sales when the gift certificates are redeemed. The comment we hear most often from customers is that they went into stores that they had

never visited before—great exposure for the cost of a \$25 gift certificate.

JOINT ADVERTISING

But events cannot be relied on as the sole source for generating downtown traffic. In between events, your customers need constantly to be reminded that you are there and that you have a lot to offer. The most effective way we have found to communicate this message is through cooperative advertising. We are not talking about a boxed group ad, but a tastefully designed awareness advertisement that combines product and image to create a highly effective promotion. This ad format can be translated into several media, including print, radio, television, and direct mail.

By creating a series of ads that have a consistent look, sound, or theme, you give the illusion of frequency, while still communicating an overall "shop downtown" message, no matter which merchants are being featured. Cooperative advertising is also a great way to leverage the buying power of downtown merchants.

Our most effective cooperative advertising tool is our downtown magazine, *In Town*. The magazine is a 4-color, 40-page glossy publication that is mailed to 48,000 homes in our trade area twice a year. We refer to the magazine as a cleverly disguised advertising piece because that is exactly what it is. We have taken great care to create a magazine that is not just filled with traditional ads, but with gift sections, restaurant guides, event calendars,

community articles, and much more. The magazine has a shelf life far beyond that of any other advertising that we do.

The main benefit of creating a magazine versus other advertising opportunities is our ability to control the message. The *In Town* magazine has built a reputation as the source of what is new and happening

in Downtown Rochester, and people look forward to receiving it every spring and fall. We have seized that opportunity and our magazine has become our single most powerful advertising tool.

Overall, advertising your commercial district is a full-time, year-round job. Only through a combination of special events with retail elements and mixed-media advertising, can you ensure awareness of your downtown, with the security of knowing that you are controlling the message, and thus managing the image of your downtown.



HOW TO USE THE SIDEWALK SALE: A PRIMER FOR MERCHANTS

Order Specially for the Sidewalk Sale

Look for a line of merchandise that complements what you usually sell, but appeals to those who are just browsing. Place orders well in advance.

Don't Make the Sidewalk Sale a Garage Sale

Shoppers can find a lot of distressed merchandise at the many garage sales held all summer; display that kind of merchandise and that's how customers will think of you.

Make the Merchandise Attractive

You're making an impression on potential customers who might not otherwise even notice your shop. Sell at cost if necessary to get attendees to buy something.

Work with Your Suppliers

Perhaps your business doesn't lend itself easily to a sidewalk

retail situation. Odds are, however, that your suppliers can help you find something that will be a perfect once-a-year complement for your business and give customers a reason to visit you.

Consider a Charity Tie-in

Another way to make use of your sidewalk frontage and build sales is to help a charity. Give the group your space and use signs or donate a percentage of your revenue from the sidewalk sale to the charity.

Make Customers Come Inside

What's outside should be like an appetizer—tasty, but not the main course. If customers have to pay inside, they will be exposed to the rest of your product line—including your "A" merchandise. There's nothing wrong with that—and you might even make a few extra sales.

Remember to Advertise

Send a card to regular customers ahead of the event. Buy newspaper, radio, or TV ads or use additional direct mail.

Track Your Customers

Later in the year, ask your patrons how they found out about your store. If the sidewalk sale was their first exposure to your merchandise, this information will help you plan your future participation.

Work Extra Hours

Nothing turns off people to an area more than to find stores closed when they are there. For the weekend of the sidewalk sale, match hours to district activities.

Source: Adapted from News About the Junction, by the West Seattle Junction Parking and Business Improvement Area.

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January 13-17, 2003

NMSC, Real Estate Development Institute
Washington, D.C. (202) 588-6329
<http://www.mainst.org/Conferences/Institute/index.htm>

January 22-25, 2003

International Economic Development Council, "If You Build It, Will They Come?"
Tempe, Arizona, (202) 223-7800
<http://iedconline.org>

January 29-30, 2003

Main Street New Jersey, People & Money: Managing Main Street's Resources
Trenton, N.J. (609) 633-9769
http://www.state.nj.us/dca/dhcr/msnj_dri.htm

January 29-31, 2003

North Carolina Main Street Conference, Strategies for the Future: Downtown Salisbury, N.C.
Email: amorris@dca.commerce.state.nc.us

January 30-February 1, 2003

Local Government Commission, 2nd Annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference
New Orleans, La.
<http://www.outreach.psu.edu/C&I/SmartGrowth>

January 31-February 3, 2003

International Downtown Association, The IDA Downtown Institute
Long Beach, Calif. (202) 293-4505
<http://www.ida-downtown.org>

February 3-7, 2003

NMSC, Main Street Certification Institute
Washington, D.C. (202) 588-6329
<http://www.mainst.org/Conferences/Institute/index.htm>

March 29-April 2, 2003

American Planning Association, National Planning Conference
Denver, Colo.
<http://www.planning.org/2003conference/index.htm>

April 23-24, 2003

Main Street New Jersey, Guiding Design on Main Street
Trenton, N.J. (609) 633-9769
http://www.state.nj.us/dca/dhcr/msnj_dri.htm

April 26-28, 2003

International Downtown Association, Spring Conference
Memphis, Tenn., 202-293-4505
<http://www.ida-downtown.org/>

May 5-11, 2003

Preservation Week
(202) 588-6125
www.nthp.org

May 18-21, 2003

NMSC, National Town Meeting on Main Street
Cincinnati, Ohio (202) 588-6239
<http://www.mainst.org/Conferences/NTM/index.htm>

August 3-6, 2003

Scenic America, Scenic Summit: Action for America's Communities, Countryside, and Public Lands
Denver, Colo., (202) 543-6200
<http://www.scenicsummit.org>

Calendar entries of state, regional, and national interest may be submitted in writing by the fifth of each month for the following month's newsletter. We reserve the right to edit all entries based on appropriateness and space.

Strengthening the Commercial District: 10 TIPS FOR TERRIFIC RETAIL PROMOTIONS

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ATTITUDE AND THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

According to T.J. Reid, a national retail and marketing consultant and author of several publications, a poor image can and must be improved in today's marketplace to be competitive. Image and attitude takes more than just saying to ourselves, "I'll do the best I can." We must be better than our best. In any field or sport, a professional is one who loves the game, is proficient at it, and plays for keeps. Perhaps more important than anything else, professionals never quit, no matter what the odds; they give a little extra effort in order to excel. This surge makes the difference in any kind of competition—and it starts with attitude.

To be your best requires "**ATTITUDE**":

A mbition (a goal in life)	U nderstanding (empathy)
T act (good manners/customer service)	D esire (a true interest/concern)
T raining (product knowledge)	E nthusiasm (excitement/energy)
I nterest (caring about the customer)	S incerity (honestly meaning it!)
T houghtfulness (showing you care)	

FOR MORE INFORMATION

PUBLICATIONS

Creative Promotion Ideas for Main Street. The National Trust's Main Street Center.

Contains more than 100 ideas and case studies on retail sales, special events, image development, and holiday promotions.

Marketing an Image for Main Street. The National Trust's Main Street Center.

Find out how to define your community's essence, translate that identity into visual symbols or graphics, and develop targeted strategies to make your district come alive.

A Primer on Nonprofit PR. Kathleen A. Neal, APR.

A basic PR manual for nonprofit organizations; covers the gamut of what you should know: crisis management, press releases, media relations, printed materials, mailings, special events, networking, web sites, and more.

Retail Business Kit for Dummies. Rick Segel.

Expert advice on branding, marketing, and merchandising goods and services; savvy

strategies for creating eye-catching displays. Includes CD with sample business forms, promotional items, and checklists.

What Mother Never Told Ya About Retail: A Small Store Survival Guide. T.J. Reid, Retail Resources Publications, 1991.

From gift wrapper in 1959 to "Louisiana Retailer of the Year" in 1984, T.J. Reid has lived the ups and downs of the small store fashion maven. Now a consultant, in this book she shares her strategy for success for anyone in the apparel or gift industry.

52 Promotions: A Year's Worth of Profit! A Retailer's Guide. T.J. Reid, Retail Resources Publications, 1995.

A compilation of successful promotions from small retailers across the country. Includes sample ads, store handouts, postcards—even selling tips and newsletter copies.

1,001 Ideas to Create Retail Excitement. Edgar A. Falk.

Full of practical suggestions to help small retailers attract

new customers: exciting holiday and seasonal promotions, in-store special events that draw shoppers, sales that build future business, and community involvement programs that build public—and customer—awareness.

NEWSLETTERS

Downtown Promotion Reporter Downtown Promotion Reporter is published monthly by the Downtown Research and Development Center. The Center provides news, information, and analysis for successful downtown revitalization through its newsletters, books, and reports.

Downtown Idea Exchange—Essential Information for Downtown Revitalization

Downtown Idea Exchange is published twice a month by the Downtown Research and Development Center, an independent organization which has, since 1954, analyzed and reported on downtown problems and solutions in an effort to provide a focus for revitalizing cities.

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The National Trust for Historic Preservation is the only national, private organization chartered by Congress to encourage public participation in the preservation of sites, buildings, and objects significant in American history. The National Main Street Center® a program of the National Trust, provides technical assistance in downtown and neighborhood commercial district revitalization to communities throughout the nation.