



Marketing Your Community

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INTRODUCTION

Competition to attract new investment and jobs into communities is fierce. There are literally thousands of communities in the US annually competing for a relatively small number of business expansion and relocation projects. Communities must also continually market themselves to their existing businesses, as it is far easier to keep a business or assist them with expansion than to attract new investment. Marketing is a critical component of a successful community and economic development program. This module defines marketing in the context of community/economic development, explains the components of a successful business/industry marketing program and discusses the key elements in a marketing plan. The use of the terms business and industry will be used interchangeably and simply refer to all the various kinds of businesses or industries in general.

Communities market themselves to a variety of entities: new firms, existing businesses, tourists, new residents, retail and restaurant chains...the list goes on. Communities also market themselves to state and regional marketing organizations that are looking for “product” (your community) to market. Communities need to think strategically about how to spend their marketing dollars by asking themselves some key questions: Is my community relatively small and resource constrained? Should we be working with a larger regional economic development organization to market us to prospects outside of the region to which we belong?

While the principles behind marketing to various audiences are similar, the specifics of the marketing tactics vary according to the target audience. Our focus for this module will not be directed at marketing to tourists, new residents, or retail. The focus of this module will be specific to attracting new firms and retaining and expanding existing companies.

MARKETING DEFINITIONS

There are many definitions of marketing – marketing a product like a car or ice cream is not the same as marketing a place for business investment. Marketing in the context of economic and community development means “creating an image in the minds of key executives that make rare expansion or relocation decisions and staying contact with them so that when the time comes to act, they consider a particular community.” (Robert Pittman) Creating this image is key to

successful economic development marketing. Of course, actively pursuing businesses with visits, mailings, follow-up, etc. is also critical to a success economic development marketing program.

COMPONENTS OF MARKETING

Community marketing can be divided into three broad steps:

1. Defining the product and message
2. Identify the audience(s)
3. Distribute the message and create awareness

Defining the Product and Message

The foundation of all community/economic development marketing is a thorough understanding of the place or “the product.” This understanding must be based in fact – not perception through the use of a Community SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) and Strategic Visioning and Planning. These topics are covered in detail in Modules 2 & 3 however is worthwhile to briefly discuss how this foundational work must be done in order to do effective marketing.

A thorough SWOT Analysis looks at all of the various community factors related to making a community attractive to investment. These would include but are certainly not limited to:

- Workforce (Availability & Quality)
- Utilities
- Transportation
- Sites and Building
- Business Climate
- Housing
- Quality of Life
- Taxes and Regulations
- Incentives

It is particularly important to develop a realistic viewpoint of your community and not “sugar-coat” the facts. Every community will have strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Most important is what the community does with the information through strategic planning and visioning. Once leaders community leaders and citizens understand they can more effectively chart a direction for future growth and development. What does the community want to be in the future? Does the community have the assets and requirements for heavy industry? Do the residents want these kinds of jobs? Is there a research

institution to support the growth of high tech companies? The results of the SWOT very effectively focus and define the marketing audience.

It is imperative for the community to do this for themselves because any project scouting around for a new site or expansion area will do this for themselves. You need to know how your community is perceived externally so that you can leverage the strengths and opportunities and address the weaknesses & threats through a strategic plan.

Marketing Image

A fundamental part of defining the product and marketing message is to create a effective marketing image. A community's image, as defined by Philip Kotler and others is "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people (residents, target audience, outside public, etc.) have of a place.

The image of a community or place can profoundly affect the decisions of companies on where to locate. Louisiana is all too familiar with this concept given the recent natural disasters it has suffered at the hands of hurricanes. The state suffers from an image in many minds of being a target for devastating storms that leave nothing in their path even though 2/3rds of the state was relatively unaffected by those hurricanes. In reality, Louisiana has an excellent business climate and has recently landed the headquarters of Abermarle Corporate and Edison Chouest Offshore (ECO) is adding 1,000 jobs in its new expansion.

A state or community's image often determines whether it is on the initial facility location search list or not. The image can have a strong but intangible effect on the final location decision once a community reaches the short list. That is, when the decision is down to the final two or three communities and the profit and cost profiles are similar – the marketing image can be a deal-maker or breaker.

A marketing image should be:

- Valid
- Believable
- Simple
- Appealing
- Distinctive (not just another place to work, live, and play)
- Related to the Target Audience

If the marketing image does not meet these criteria it can do more harm than good for a community.

Slogans & Logos

Slogans and logos play an important part in keeping the image of a place in a target audience's mind. They can be used to communicate a community's image

and make an impression that is remember-able in relation to all of the clutter and noise of other communities. Slogans are briefly stated ideas, themes, or “catchphrases” used to convey a community or region’s image (see examples in the accompanying box).

Examples of Economic Development Marketing Slogans

What image do these slogans create in your mind?

Indianapolis: Competitive by Nature

Seattle: MetroNatural

Ardmore, OK: See More, Do More, Live More – In Ardmore

Birmingham, AL: More Magic Than Ever

Chicago, IL – Make No Little Plans – Choose Chicago

Denver – Try the Air

Logos are graphic or pictorial images used to help convey a community’s images as well. Logos can provide a visual unifying theme for marketing materials and become the community’s “brand.” This common theme reinforces the image of the community throughout all of its marketing tactics and strategies. For example, Ardmore, Oklahoma uses a logo that brings together all of its major transportation assets – air, rail, and interstate highway.

Identify the Audience

After the community image and message have been crafted, the next step is to identify the audience for the development marketing program. In a general sense, community and economic development marketing audiences include:

- Desirable companies not yet located in the community, site selection consultants, industrial real estate companies, and others involve in corporate expansion or recruitment.
- Lead-generating economic development organizations: LED and other regional economic development organizations around Louisiana, Utilities such as SWEPCO, Entergy, and CLECO as well as others.
- Existing business already in the community (business retention and expansion) and if appropriate their headquarters or regional offices
- Entrepreneurs (new business start-ups)

This group is the external marketing audience or those organizations and individuals that can assist a community or region to attract investment and create jobs. There is also an internal audience that needs to be captured as well.

- Community stakeholders (elected officials, board members, sponsors, etc.)
- Media (Newspapers, TV, radio)
- General public

Community and economic development organizations need to market to the

internal audience so that they may continue to secure strong cooperation and support in the overall development effort. Many communities have struggled with economic development because not enough attention was given to ensuring that a strong community coalition was present to support the overall effort. This is exactly why communities must go through strategic planning process prior to and continuing through all marketing efforts.

Targeted Industries & Audiences

The external development marketing audience identified above is still quite large, and successful communities drill down and identify specific sectors and organizations within the marketplace that are prime prospects. These are called “Targeted Industries” and also include targeted audiences. This is critical because communities need to be as strategic as possible with their constrained resources. In fact, all communities have constrained resources driving home the point that working with a regional economic development organization to provide marketing for a group of smaller communities is very effective to make everyone’s resources go further.

The challenge in targeting industries is to identify those that would be a “good fit” for the community. In order to do this, communities and regional organizations need to develop market segments and associated messaging for each.

Economic development market segments for communities include:

- Sector/Industry – manufacturing, service, technical, logistics, etc. There will be further segmentation within each larger sector for example, technical sectors include information technology, microelectronics, and data centers.
- Geography – for a community in rural Louisiana, for example, it would probably be most fruitful to try and recruit companies in higher cost locations such as the rust belt rather than in rural areas close by.
- Type of Company/Organization – smaller communities may be better off targeting small firms that may be privately owned. Larger communities can target these as well, but also may want to target larger publicly traded companies. However, there are always exceptions to this rule. Sometimes rural counties or parishes can come together to create an asset such as a Mega-site or a particular workforce that certain company’s desire.

Target industry analysis is extremely important and often means the difference between success and failure of a marketing program. Target industry selection criteria include:

- Match between the location needs of the business sector and characteristics of the community (from the SWOT Analysis)
- Historical growth rates and potential future growth rates of industries

- Skill levels and wage rates of industries
- Diversification potential of the industries for the local economy
- Other community-specific considerations such as environmental friendliness, sustainability, industry image, etc.

When the target industries are identified, the next step is to identify “actual” companies in those sectors that will make good targets. Companies for targeting should be in expansion mode and may meet the above-mentioned criteria or others.

It would be irresponsible to say that each and every community should have and be implementing their own target marketing program – but it is absolutely necessary that each and every community is working with a targeted marketing program. The actual marketing activities could be done by a regional organization with the local community working on “product development” to create the criteria that attract those targeted industries.

The target industry and company selection process must be based on sound research. Data on growth rates, location criteria and patterns, etc. should be collected and analyzed in order to select the best targets. Many communities hire professional consultants or rely on local universities to assist with this procedure. If the community undertakes this analysis itself, there is a huge amount of information available free, only a few clicks away, on the Internet.

Distribute Message and Create Awareness

After creating the message and identifying the target audience, the final basic step in community marketing is to distribute the message and create awareness. Distributing this message is usually done through a mix of marketing tactics and materials. Careful consideration should be given to the best use of constrained resources. Ways to promote and market a community include:

- Advertising – Television and radio is quite expensive and would probably not be the best choice for most communities, although some state-level economic development organizations have used it effectively for example, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the state’s public/private economic development marketing organization, has been effectively using NPR for years now with the message counteracting the decline of the auto-industry there. A broad range of print media for advertising such as:

National Business Publications

Wall Street Journal
Business Week

Industry Trade Publications

Oriented towards a specific industry such as aviation or plastics

Site Selection/Development Magazines

*Expansion Management
Area Development
Site Selection*

Because of the expense, advertising in national business publications is usually limited to larger urban areas or states. Industry trade publications are read by executives within specific industries and thus can be used to cost effectively reach a community's target industries. Site selection/development magazines target corporate executives that typically are involved in corporate expansion decisions, but cover a broad range of industries. There may be other niche print publications such as local business journals and chamber of commerce magazines that communities can explore as options especially when the messaging is related to building support for the overall economic development program.

- Direct Mail – The amounts of “junk mail” we receive today is skyrocketing and most of it lands in the trash. However, many marketing programs operate successful direct mail campaigns aimed specifically at the target companies they have carefully selected. Research shows that repeated mailings to a select audience has a much higher response rate than general blanket mailings. If a community sends out 1,000-targeted mailings, gets ten company prospects and lands one new company, benefit would be tremendous even though the “batting average” would be low.
- Email – Many communities are now using email to promote their communities. Some email messages are direct “sales pitches” while others are electronic copies of newsletters, announcements, etc. Targeted email can be effective, but random mass emailings are usually treated as spam.
- Post cards and other brief mailings – As discussed previously, these brief reminder pieces sent out quarterly or semi-annually help keep a community in the minds of target company executives.
- Trade Shows – Many communities successfully market themselves at trade shows to their target industries. There can be hundreds of executives from a target industry at a trade show, so attendance can be a very cost-effective way to reach the target audience. Many communities buy or share booths at the trade show and stock them with marketing materials. Others just “walk the floor” and look for opportunities to meet executives from key companies face-to-face. Most effective communities join together in regions and make their resources go even further because companies look at “regions” not individual communities.
- Personal Contact – This is the best way to market a community, but it is often difficult and expensive to get a personal contact opportunity with a corporate executive. Trade shows are one way to do this, as is the telemarketing follow-up, which is part of the direct mail campaign discussed previously. Other means of personal contact include trips to

- visit prospects, but this obviously is expensive and is usually done after a prospect has expressed interest in a community.
- **Networking** – Many leads come to communities through networking with other economic development officials and agencies. Networking contacts should include the state economic development agency, utility companies, real estate brokers and developers, site selection consultants, existing employers in the community, railroads, and other organizations that may be knowledgeable about companies in the expansion mode.
 - **Public Relations** – While all of the activities above can be considered public relations, successful communities have even more proactive programs to get their message out to their target audience and general public. Local, regional and state news channels (television, radio and print) should be sent regularly sent press releases and contacted to get the community's name in print and to publicize significant events.
 - **Web Sites** – More and more companies gather information from the Internet and site selection data is no exception. It is almost taken for granted today that a community will have a web site with relevant economic development information. Not having one sends a negative message to potential investors and certainly doesn't give the community a good way to get information out to its stakeholders quickly and at practically no cost. In addition to containing basic economic and demographic information about a community (especially the kind that isn't available from public data sources), a website can have testimonials from local executives (preferably in audio or video format), community pictures, and GIS-enabled databases of available sites and buildings (this can often be a link to a larger statewide system).

Suggestions for Effective Economic Development Web Sites:

- Don't buy the economic development web site in a municipal, chamber or other web site. Make the economic development part at most one click away from the home page.
- Orient your economic development web site toward external users (prospects). Don't make users wade through chamber calendars and news events.
- Keep the content up to date. A field that shows when the site was "last-updated" is very effective.
- Make the site lively with graphics, pictures, and video.
- **Drive your target audiences to the website in all marketing materials.**
- Consider investment in a professional website developer to optimize your site.

Certain marketing materials are essential to promoting a community. These types of marketing materials include:

- Brochures – The best formats are oriented in portrait style and are from 4-8 pages four-color professional highlighting the economic development assets and livability of the community. These can be expensive and some communities opt for the less expensive "desk top" versions.
- Post cards and other brief mailings – These brief reminder pieces are usually sent out quarterly or at other regular intervals to keep a community's image in top of mind for the target company executive's.
- Community profiles – These are more in-depth fact sheets about communities. Often 15-20 pages or more pages in length, they are really more valuable as a follow up tool once an executive's interest in a community has been piqued. Care should be taken to be extremely judicious in choosing the material for these profiles so that "everything but the kitchen sink" syndrome is avoided.
- Audio-visual presentations – This category includes CDs, DVDs, computer presentations and the like (websites were covered previously). These are effective as a selling tool once contact and interest have been established for a "real project." Mass production of these media is almost never effective.
- Promotional items – This category includes t-shirts, pens, tote bags, and

- many, many other creative items branded for your community. These can be very helpful in with imaging.
- Newsletters – Short newsletters mailed or emailed to prospects can be effective marketing tools. However, newsletters mailed to the external audience should not contain purely local information such as local picnics, etc. Newsletters sent to external target audiences should focus on recent positive developments, company locations, and expansions in the community.

The Marketing Plan

A marketing plan is a written document developed through a consensus building process. The marketing plan should contain all of the following elements:

- A mission statement for the marketing plan and a vision statement for the community
- A situation analysis (SWOT analysis summary)
- Description of the target audience (industries and companies)
- Marketing goals and objectives
- Strategic action items (sometimes called tactics) to achieve each objective
- Budget and resource requirements
- Clearly defined staff requirements and positions
- Clearly defined responsibilities of participating organizations and stakeholders
- A plan for evaluation and measurement of implementation.

Marketing goals should be prioritized and define the desired accomplishments. Marketing objectives describe the general approach to achieving the goal. Action items or tactics are specific, measurable activities designed to accomplish an objective. Be sure the marketing plan is detailed enough to be productive and engaging without being overwhelming and unrealistic. Detailed marketing plans are best, and they can include an executive summary for the general public's benefit.

Marketing plans should be dynamic and “living.” No one can really predict how each tactic will work out. The plan needs to be revisited and updated on a regular basis. Please see the Appendix for a marketing plan template/sample.

CONCLUSION

Marketing your community is a huge undertaking. Basing it on a competitive assessment and identification of realistic target audiences allows the community to go from a “shot-gun” approach to the “stealth-missile” approach. It is imperative that the marketing plan address not only new investment but also includes existing businesses and entrepreneurship. It is an accepted fact that most new jobs come from existing companies and new start-ups.

Communities of all sizes can be successful with economic development through application of the marketing principles presented above. The definition of success needs to be different based on the community. A big city may think of success as capturing a headquarters with 1,000 jobs. Small and rural communities welcome companies with 10-50 employees – these often have the great potential for growth as well. Successful communities know that keeping a marketing plan fresh and having the patience to implement it over time is what it takes to achieve economic development goals.