

Downtown Revitalization Checklist— how to make your destination unforgettable in 8 steps.

A community looking to revitalize itself should consider an image update to match improvements in infrastructure. For visitors and residents alike, creating a sense of place can help to define a specific region or downtown, make navigation easier, and identify the amazing reasons to visit.

The process to create a new brand identity for a location can be full of uncertainty. What is the right amenity to promote? What will have the biggest impact? These are great questions to ask—you're already on your way to figuring it all out.

The list of steps below is how Trampoline helps municipalities market themselves, from concept to the creation of a campaign that will surprise and delight tourists and locals alike.

1. DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE

Before you plan the spending of a single dollar, establish a granular profile of your target audience. You can take it a step further and segment within an audience.

Who are you trying to reach?

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Lifestyle
- Education
- Relationship to Technology

You can add more options, the goal is to know who you are talking to in order to tailor your message and placement to target.

Why are you trying to reach them?

- Real estate / Residency
- Retail / Economic Development
- Workforce Recruitment
- Tourism

Achieving a desired action requires mapping the path ahead of time. Make sure that you know enough about your audience to be able to connect the dots for them.

By taking the time to establish these profiles, your next stage of engaging stakeholders and community members is easier to plan.

2. ESTABLISH STAKEHOLDERS

Every community has residents who are engaged, outspoken, and have influence on their neighbors. For a placemaking campaign to be successful, and put into use, it must reflect the region it is intended to represent. Local buy-in is paramount to the marketing that's created, and the process to create it.

It's important to identify the individuals who will contribute, as well as those contrarians that exist in every town or city. The earlier they are involved and allowed to state their concerns, the better the process will go, as any potential communication conflicts can be established early on.

Stakeholders can help to create the 'design problem' to be solved by an agency with graphics and messaging. They know the reasons to visit, they can best make the case for their home, they know the criticisms or perceptions that need to be addressed in any outbound marketing. **It's important to remember that pleasing everyone is often an impossibility, especially at the community level.** But listening and trying to develop a campaign that works on several levels is possible.

Focus groups to determine the messaging pillars of a community should be short and small—no more than 15 people. Don't allow a single resident, entrepreneur, or politician to dominate the discussion. In a room full of different, solicited opinions, amplify areas of agreement. Work to position similar areas of interest, or concern, and begin building momentum in one direction or another.

3. MESSAGE CREATION

With goals set forth by residents and stakeholders in place, it's time for the agency to start pitching ideas on direction. Language choice and tone can set the expectations of both travelers and locals, and design style can literally point destination seekers in the right direction. Many placemaking campaigns have a modular structure, often because destinations need to be many things for many audiences. It's possible to communicate different reasons to visit with a consistent delivery.

Mood boards, concept pieces, and prioritization of information take place at this stage—what are we leading with? Which audience will benefit the destination the most? Can certain communication work across channels and appeal to more than one group?

At this stage, competitive research is also a crucial step in the process. What are neighboring destinations marketing themselves as? How can we position ourselves differently?

Use The Onliness Test—fill in the brackets:
Our [offering] is the only [category] that [benefit].

This is a narrow take on how you stand out, and, while it's limiting, it really forces an organization to prioritize what's important when it comes to communication.

4. DESIGN

Allow your agency or consultant to do what they do best: create. At the contract stage, a number of versions should be requested, so that even if one direction misses the mark, creatively, there should be other options up for discussion.

Design is a process, not an event, so there might be a few weeks of work, but agencies should offer regular communication from a point person or account manager to stakeholders in the community. This should help to manage expectations, answer questions, or address concerns.

Placemaking campaigns need head-turning graphics, meaningful headlines, and consistent application. Communities need to create repeat impressions online, in advertising, on streetscaping, and signage.

5. REVIEW & REVISIONS

The first-round critique of a brand identity is always exciting! An exchange of ideas—different approaches to solve a communication challenge. It's important to remember that the process is still in the early stages, not everything will be perfect from the outset, compromises and revisions will take place. Some ideas might not land, or miss the mark completely, and that's ok. **It's the agency's job to look at things from an outsider's perspective, the community's job to know what's right for them.**

Make your feedback specific and actionable. Marketers are always in search of 'The Why' especially when it comes to their own work. Why does a particular headline work? Why were those colors a bad choice? Understanding the reasons behind a statement will help the creative team develop a campaign that meets with the approval of a group.

Stakeholders should also be looking for 'The Why.' Ask the agency about the strategy on a particular approach. With design, there's usually a reason for everything. It can be difficult to set individual opinions aside and be open to an outside perspective, but in the case of placemaking, an approach that's unencumbered by local politics or prattle might have merit.

As in the focus groups, when establishing priorities or challenges, look to create a clear path forward by finding consensus—whether that's to approve of a direction or to rule one out. Keep the momentum!

6. BRAND LAUNCH & PRESS

When the design process is complete and a brand standards document exists to keep usage consistent, it's time to reveal the new look to the public. **This is a big step, and you only get one shot at it.** If the creative development has been transparent and the stakeholders have a consensus, the results should be on solid strategic footing, and the design choices obviously explained.

Logo, positioning statement and signal art alone might not be enough to take to market. Consumers and residents alike will respond more favorably to a campaign in use, rather than a conceptual reveal. What will it look like on the side of a bus? Or, on a T-shirt? Will it replace the gateway signage when travelers enter town? It's better to show the answer to these questions, and get ahead of public hand-wringing.

In projects past, we've hosted a community event to launch a new look for a downtown, or a tourism campaign kickoff. It allows the agency and stakeholders to field questions together, and doubles as a press event for an earned media angle.

Personal opinions from reporters and residents will impact the rollout. What's important to remember is the messaging pillars established early on, and whether or not the placemaking campaign answers that communication need. It might not be in a style that everyone agrees on, but design is subjective, while strategy and marketing are targeted and systematic.

7. OUTBOUND MARKETING

Surround your target with impressions of your destination. Repeat the look and feel across as many different mediums as possible. Video, social, digital, outdoor, traditional methods, guerrilla tactics, sponsorships. An outbound marketing campaign should target specific groups by demographic or interest, and the message should reflect that.

If you're trying to persuade anglers to fish your community's waterways, that's a very different approach than, say, convincing someone to look for antiques in town. The same community can position itself to both trawlers and antiquers, but might have to create a unique ad for each.

The goal should be to create a consistent look and feel, so that prospective visitors become familiar with the outreach. The design of ads or commercials should be reflected on the website, and again when visitors arrive at the destination. Signage, way finding and bannering are all opportunities to let a traveler know that they've arrived.

8. RESULTS & REPORTING

How will we determine success? After all of the work to create something meaningful, and send that message to market, it's important to quantify results.

What defines a favorable outcome depends on the community. It might be prosperity, it might just be progress. An increase in traffic, both website and foot, is usually a good indication of improved awareness—the campaign is doing its job to entice visitors to learn more. At a certain point, the process goes from marketing to sales, and becomes more about specific offerings or packages and less about place.

Our agency encourages clients to try more than a single approach to advertising. With a solid, consistent brand and positioning statement, a community can be very targeted with messaging. And, while brand should be firmly established, campaigns can change.

Monitor click-through rates, survey visitors, gather data about what is (or isn't) working well, and make adjustments when necessary. Reach out to new markets when it makes sense. If your town invests in a mountain bike park, it's time to go talk to mountain bikers.

Downtown Revitalization involves a lot of improvements. Updated building façades, smart streets and urban planning to address physical issues like parking and safety. A modern, scaleable, meaningful brand that represents a community is also a key component of revitalization. **Communicate all that your region has to offer, build a sense of belonging that extends from neighborhoods to newcomers.**

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