

Chapter 6: Promotions

Promotions are often a misunderstood element in Downtown revitalization programs. They are frequently thought of as “frills” or “decorations” rather than substantive pieces of a comprehensive revitalization strategy. In fact, they are critical. This Promotional Strategies Chapter contains observations and recommendations that the Promotions Committee and City can use to guide marketing efforts into the future. This includes recommendations to sustain and improve the general image, retail and special events, as well as introducing tourism as a potential economic development driver.

Downtown Sylvania has long been a stage for events. The Chamber has a strong history of Downtown festivals and activities. The Historical Village has a wonderful living

history program, and the recently re-organized Sylvania Downtown Association has made events and promotions a primary focus for their group. Almost more than any other aspect of this Plan, effectively marketing Downtown Sylvania is key to the long-term, overall success of the revitalization efforts. The SDBA, Chamber and City will require a very well organized and clear message to be heard above all the other advertising “noise” in today’s world.

Downtown Sylvania marketing efforts can’t over-promise or under-deliver. On the other hand, stakeholders cannot afford to wait until everything is “perfect” before launching promotional campaigns. The goal of this chapter is to help even out the peaks and valleys, and bring consistency, not only in terms of sales in the Downtown, but to the ways in which the message is conveyed to various market segments.

It is believed that, with proper steps forward, Downtown Sylvania can enjoy a growing reputation as a destination for retail good and services, along with arts, history and culture. We know from previous material that various existing physical attributes and assets create a substantial foundational opportunity to build upon. From the study of market forces, we also know that there are specific

and definite economic opportunities provide a strong platform to support the greater development of a regional destination offering a unique experience.

However, even extraordinary potential can lay dormant and slow to materialize without efforts to promote and market. As identified, downtown Sylvania demonstrates certain competitive advantages and assets. Existing historical features are significant – but are also hidden gems. There are spaces that are attractive now – but also have potential to be transformed into amazing places for human interaction, commerce and enjoyment of history, art and culture. Successful existing businesses could truly flourish in the context of being part of a larger synergistic collection of arts-related retail opportunities, within a unique mix of restaurants and cafés promoting the character and talent of the business owners. Several existing activities and special events represent early signals of change and growing momentum which draw people and help animate and enliven Downtown. All of this adds up to the opportunity to create a more experiential, memorable and unique place.



“Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don’t matter, and those who matter don’t mind.” - Dr. Suess



Section A: General Image & Identity

Will Rogers once noted, “Attitudes are contagious. Is yours worth catching?” Human nature dictates that negative emotions are easier to spread than positive ones, and perception often creates reality. Given that, the job of managing the general image of Downtown Sylvania is vital to revitalization efforts. How people perceive the Downtown will directly impact the amount of time, and also how much money, they are willing to spend. Creating and promoting a positive image of Downtown is critical to revitalization efforts. The DSA, and especially those members on the Promotions Committee, will become the “good will ambassadors” for Downtown Sylvania.

Each merchant, each Sylvania Downtown Association member, each Downtown employee, has a duty to reinforce a positive image of Downtown Sylvania each day. Customers form their opinion of the entire Downtown on a variety of things using all their senses. Fairly (and sometimes unfairly) the small things make the biggest impression. Many things are outside the DSA’s control, but as much as possible, the DSA will need to proactively think about the customer’s experience and create a welcoming environment.

Public and private investments in tangible buildings and public infrastructure need to be supported with parallel investments in marketing and promotions if goals are to be accomplished as rapidly as possible. There are many reasons to believe that Downtown Sylvania can leverage existing assets and claim a unique niche as a specialty

retail/service and regional arts, history and cultural center. This can propel Downtown Sylvania toward becoming an honest alternative to the sameness of suburban strip malls and big box retailers. However, deliberate and consistent messaging, branding and marketing are absolutely critical.

As a subset of overall marketing for Downtown Sylvania the following steps are recommended as initial steps toward branding efforts for the district. In large part, these steps are oriented toward more consensus-building around elements that contribute to identity. More meetings of property owners, downtown stakeholders and municipal leaders are absolutely essential. Participants in these consensus-building efforts should be tasked with the job of developing answers to the following questions:

1. How strong is the support for the idea of focusing on a local identity that includes art, history and culture in Downtown Sylvania?
2. What is the overall vision for Downtown? The vision generated from this planning effort is to support the development of a unique multi-functioning space that includes history-related learning opportunities, places to experience and enjoy public art, places to gather for entertainment or other social activities and a place to encourage complementary arts-related retail business. This emerging vision also includes the goal of creating a recognizable critical mass of high-quality public and private offerings that people will remember and return to.

3. The idea of defining the district as the Main Street ARC District is one choice (ARC stands for Arts, Roots and Culture). An alternate idea would be to brand the area “Historic Sylvania” to encompass both entertainment and retail ventures in the economic environment and combine the more traditional feel of commercial Main Street south of Maplewood with the more residential feel (yet economically tied) segment of Main Street north of Maplewood. A more collaborative and focused effort may identify more alternatives and a better choice.
4. The identification of local resources such as artists and art programs that can be a source of new partnerships and assistance with marketing and project development. Included in this are learning institutions at all levels with arts-related course work and training.
5. The identification of community history and heritage elements that could be used to help define “place” and “context.” As described in the Physical Design Chapter, there are opportunities for public art and murals which should be focused on content that is contextual and speaks to the uniqueness of the community, in terms of history and local culture.
6. Discovery of unique elements to be included in the development of a logo and tagline. Such a logo and tagline should be equally complimentary to all the visually different parts of Downtown Sylvania.
7. Branding efforts should consider the development of visual

cues that allow people to see that they are in a unique place. These visual cues include unique streetscaping elements such as a manhole covers, light standards, poles, banners, public art, benches, and other physical design elements. These cues were discussed in the Physical Design Chapter, but the specific design focus should be directly connected to the promotion and branding strategy to help reinforce a consistent message.

In addition, other recommendations will help the general public better access and understand Downtown Sylvania:

- Development of a well constructed, informative and easy to navigate website is critical for Downtown success. As mentioned in the market analysis, the website needs to showcase:
 - information for visitors, residents & potential investors/developers;
 - available properties (physical description, leasing/purchasing information, photos);
 - links to other pertinent websites like the Historical Village, City, Chamber, SACIC; Downtown businesses, and non-local organizations such as Heritage Ohio and the National Main Street Center/National Trust for Historic Preservation;
 - Downtown supporters and/or program sponsors;
 - a user friendly promotional calendar;
 - current market and demographic information for merchants and developers;
 - a map showing business locations and identifying public parking areas; and

- generally act as a clearinghouse for all other relevant information related to the Downtown.

- The DSA should work with Downtown merchants to cross promote and refer customers to other Downtown businesses. Not only will this likely increase sales for merchants, but it has the (perhaps more important) effect of reinforcing the idea of Downtown as a single destination that can meet a variety of customers' needs.

- As much as possible, merchants should keep consistent business hours that overlap open times with other businesses. This is admittedly not an easy or quick thing to do. However, the more consistent experience Downtown can offer its customers, the better off Downtown will be. The more predictable "open hours" are, the more predictable foot traffic will be.

- Merchants need to stay open during special promotional events. Invariably, store owners grumble about lack of foot traffic, saying things like "Staying open is a waste of time," or "People do not make purchases during festivals." While there is truth in those assertions, it is equally true that dark storefronts during special events send a loud message that shopping Downtown is difficult, or worse, that there's nothing to buy Downtown. As part of a long term strategy, the DSA will need to balance special social events with retail events designed to make cash registers ring. (Please see later sections of this Chapter for more information on special and retail events.)

- The DSA should develop a comprehensive media relations program. One person within the organization should be designated as the media contact so that one message (during both in good times and bad) can be conveyed in the media. This will eliminate mixed (and potentially damaging) messages. DSA should submit regular press releases to

all media outlets. The Sylvania Advantage has been a tremendous partner to the Downtown. The DSA should continue to partner with this resource, and might approach the editor about creating a Downtown page or section to highlight the district's events and offerings.

- Social media outlets represent a HUGE avenue for reaching potential customers. As much as possible, the DSA and its members should work together to share customer lists. The DSA should electronically connect on a broad level with potential shoppers at least once a week, and at a more targeted level as many times as the potential customer would find the information helpful. Think of McDonalds' advertising strategy. Everyone knows who McDonalds is and what they offer, and yet we see and hear advertisements for them everywhere. Even household names need to stay in front of customers on a regular basis. This is all the more true for lesser frequented destinations.

- Anecdotal information gathered during the planning process suggests that business owners not only lament the loss but yearn for the return of a stronger sense of community within the Downtown. Until such a time that the DSA can hire paid staff, the DSA Board may consider creating a volunteer "block ambassador" program. One business owner in each block might be tasked with regularly coordinating with other merchants on that block. These kinds of routine visits would go along way to ensure open communication regarding market conditions, upcoming events, or even just encouraging each other during slow times.

- The market analysis indicates merchants should target high end niche markets. This means every aspect of the Downtown, from its virtual presence to its physical appearance should reflect the kind of high quality

"Doing business without advertising is like winking at a girl in the dark. You know what you are doing, but nobody else does."

- Stuart Henderson



environment these kinds of shoppers will expect. The DSA Promotions Committee needs to think about most of the five senses when working on general image campaigns; how does the Downtown look? Historic, colorful, trendy? How does it smell? Flowers, tempting meals/sweets, clean? How does it sound? Busy, filled with seasonal music? How does it feel? Smooth walking surfaces, comfortable resting areas?

- Merchants often feel like today's market forces are completely beyond their control. It's true, this is a tough economy. But merchants can and should control one key to their individual and collective success: high quality customer service. If each Downtown business "goes the extra mile" to provide personal, not just adequate service, people will continue to come back even if price points are higher than stores at nearby Franklin Park. Downtown retailers can and usually do excel at providing exceptional customer service. In this way, merchants directly impact both consumers' general image of the Downtown and their own bottom lines.

- To keep regular tabs on local perceptions about Downtown Sylvania, the DSA and City should consider working together to repeat consumer and merchant surveys regularly, perhaps even securing a domain such as SurveySylvania.com to facilitate this process.

Storefront Windows

Merchandising in storefront windows is critical to creating the kind of lively, vibrant and fun space customers will want to experience. In recognition of their importance, here are several considerations the DSA and City might pursue:

- Retailers should be encouraged to regularly change storefront windows. Not only will this create more visual interest for passersby, but it will subliminally reinforce the perception that the merchants care about keeping



merchandise "fresh" for their customers. This will have a positive impact for the merchants individually and the Downtown overall.

- Storefront windows for service providers are equally important; these areas should also be attractively designed and frequently changed. These are often tougher to design, especially if there are no products or visual elements related to that business. That space might be used to display historic photos or other "fun" seasonal displays. These windows might also be prime space for advertising upcoming events, recognizing key volunteers, or celebrating achievements.

- The DSA might consider sponsoring regular contests for window displays, offering a special trophy or plaque that could be passed from window to window to identify current winners.

- The DSA should develop an attractive "For Sale/Lease" sign for empty storefronts. In a manner similar to what mall might do, a consistent design and appearance would send a common message, reduce visual clutter, promote DSA as the lead Downtown management organization, and also feature realtors' and/or building owners' information so that interested parties could still make easy contact with these professionals.

Section B: Special Events

As the market study suggests, the SDBA should carefully limit the number of events it holds in the Downtown. In this instance, quality is much preferred over quantity. Special events are designed specifically to bring people into the Downtown to have a good time, and often bring people

who might otherwise not visit. However, overloading the calendar with events will not necessarily bring more people Downtown. It could actually “backfire” and have the opposite effect of making Downtown appear over-eager to attract customers, or giving them so many options that it removes the “special” from the event. It could also (very easily) over-tax the DSA’s existing volunteer base. Limited quantities reinforce intrinsic value and can heighten awareness. Limited resources (time and money) should be focused for maximum benefit rather than stretching them too thin.

Careful consideration should be given to each special event. Each event should be crafted to reinforce the kind of experience that the DSA and Downtown stakeholders want consumers to have Downtown. These experiences are an indelible part of the emerging brand Downtown Sylvania is creating for itself, so the creation of special events carries an inherent responsibility and importance. Key considerations include the following:

- Each event should have a stated purpose and evaluation tool. Similarly, paperwork for each event should be kept in a separate binder and stored electronically in a central storage area (in the “cloud” or other on-line repository). It is imperative that institutional memory for events be documented and stored for future use. People can leave an organization for a variety of reasons. This natural turnover should not be responsible for derailing events.
- Each event should reinforce the unique Downtown Sylvania brand. DSA sponsored events should be crafted to support the organization’s overall goals as well as the advancement of the Downtown as a district. There is a temptation to hold

events just for the sake of holding events. This is dangerous and can lead to burnout. Each event must serve the DSA in some meaningful way.

- After each event the DSA should “debrief” and evaluate the event for its effectiveness. The DSA might consider establishing “rules” that govern how they will proceed if an event does not meet expectations in terms of profit, attendance, or other evaluation method in place.

Section C: Retail Events

If special events bring a variety of people Downtown for the purpose of having a good time, retail events bring people Downtown to make cash registers ring. Special events bring people Downtown; retail events bring them across the threshold and into the individual businesses. For maximum benefit, retail events should cater to the target market as defined in Market Analysis, and events should be sprinkled throughout the calendar to support merchants’ slower

times of year.

- The Historical Village has sponsored spring Sidewalk Sales for many years, and anecdotal information suggests they are popular with residents. However, while spring is a time when residents are clearing out their closets and looking to make room, merchants have typically just started rolling out their new summer merchandise and are not likely to want to discount those items. Event organizers might consider coordinating with the DSA or individual merchants to develop a program wherein event attendees are encouraged or rewarded for stopping into stores before/during/after attending the Sidewalk Sale itself.
- Downtown Delights has been a staple event for the DSA for several years. Coverage in the Sylvania Advantage has been very good, and has helped spotlight the event. The DSA should begin working with merchants to track the number of attendees they see in their stores during the events, and also how many people come back as a result of the event. Brief





demographic information on these attendees and returning guests might also be helpful, perhaps accomplished by a post-card sized survey/coupon distributed during the event itself. In this way, the DSA can target marketing efforts for future Downtown Delights, other events, and individual merchants' events.

- The Chamber sponsors a popular farmers market annually from May through October at Mayberry. Though they tried holding it Downtown in the former Bumble's parking lot, visibility was poor and attendance was poor. We suggest working with the Chamber to re-locate the farmers market back Downtown, but in a carefully selected and highly visible location, and with a significant marketing component to announce its new "home" in Downtown. This kind of "pretend retail" will not only bring people Downtown on a regular basis for four months out of the year, but it will help people associate Downtown with retail shopping and could positively impact their attitudes about product availability and affordability.
- The DSA should work with each Downtown merchant to maximize point of sale opportunities, both for themselves and among the Downtown community. Each merchant can ask customers if there's anything else they need, or if there's anything else they might help the customer accomplish during his/her visit to Downtown. When done well, this kind of "value added" service will help brand the Downtown as a customer-friendly place people will come back to, as well as refer their friends.
- There are a number of ideas the DSA can work with partners such as the City, Historical Village and Chamber to produce: progressive coupons or events, shopping passports, "same day specials," holiday promotions (Valentines Day, Mothers' or Fathers' Day, Halloween, etc), specialized mens' or women's shopping nights – the opportunities are boundless. The only



real limitation is Sylvania's creativity and volunteer labor to support each event.

- As with special events, the DSA Promotions Committee should "debrief" and evaluate each retail event for its effectiveness. Again, if an event does not meet expectations in terms of profit, attendance, or other evaluation method in place, its continued place on the promotional calendar should be strongly re-considered.

Section D: Tourism

Having the ability to develop a tourism package is something many downtowns dream of, but few have the necessary attributes to actually accomplish. In this respect, Sylvania fares better than most. The Historical Village is a gem on the north side of Downtown, and the Lathrop House, which lies adjacent to the Downtown on the south side, is a brilliant historic "bookend." The City is ready to break ground on the River Trail, which promises to be a wonderful recreational connector between Downtown and the rest of the Sylvania community. And while George Washington never slept in

Sylvania, no infamous bank robbers ever left bullet holes in prominent Downtown buildings, and no alien invaders have ever graced Lucas County skies (as far as we know), there are still enough elements the community can work with to foster and tap a tourist market segment.

- Day trips are an increasingly popular family activity, especially those associated with historic sites. The Historical Village has a dedicated following already that regularly enjoys festivals and events. The living history programs done for local school children are a tremendous asset. These beginnings can be built into something much more substantial as time and funding permit. The City should continue to invest in this important asset, and grow additional outreach programs. As the Lathrop House continues to develop its own programming, opportunities for partnership and collaboration should be explored.
- One of the biggest themes to come from this planning process was the recognition that Downtown Sylvania has a natural, grass-roots level arts and culture district. The Historical Village and all its programs, existing business

clusters, and the pedestrian oriented, authentic built environment all combine to give Sylvania a unique opportunity. Many other communities have tried, with varying degrees of success, to artificially engineer what is naturally blooming in Sylvania. It simply needs some attention and intentional direction, and it will take off

As noted above, the Historical Village already plays a large role in the community by offering living history and art programs for school-age children and focusing on providing entertainment for families. As people come Downtown to participate in these programs, they might be encouraged to linger in the Downtown for lunch or dinner. Parents might be encouraged to drop children off for a short program and spend an hour or so shopping in nearby retail shops. The reverse is also true, merchants should be talking about more than just retail offerings in the Downtown. The DSA and Village should work together to link the Village's living history programs with merchants' retail presence. The message should be "Come have fun with us," enumerating the many reasons to come back again and again, rather than continuing as separate "islands" trying to reach overlapping target markets.

Promoting the entire Downtown as an arts and culture district is an essential piece of Sylvania's Downtown revitalization strategy. As noted in the Market Analysis, Sylvania has a realistic opportunity to recruit additional businesses that, when added to the existing business base, will make Downtown Sylvania a destination for residents and regional visitors alike. The City, DSA, Chamber and SACIC should work closely together to prepare a business recruitment package and team, and then methodically begin

building a Downtown economy that will draw shoppers. While the economic environment improves, the City and private property owners should begin implementing suggestions from the Design Chapter. Simultaneously, the DSA and Chamber should continue to sponsor special and retail events, and the DSA should work on developing itself as the lead downtown management organization. Working on all these elements in concert will lead to sustainable Downtown revitalization, and it will establish Sylvania as a tourist destination among those looking for an authentic, unique and fun shopping venue.



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