



Greater Downtown Dayton Plan

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Category: Marketing Communications, nonprofit, No. 7b

Research

In 2010, the Downtown Dayton Partnership (DDP), City of Dayton and private sector partners completed the Greater Downtown Dayton Plan, a long-term strategic blueprint for the future of Dayton's urban core. The plan also is an economic development strategy for the Dayton region, as research shows urban redevelopment increasingly is linked to a region's overall economic health and quality of life.

The DDP was charged with spearheading an effort to market the plan as a finished product. It was no easy task, as the plan had been more than a year and half in the making and was developed by more than 200 community volunteers and leaders. The plan itself included hundreds of pages of recommendations and documents organized in six broad areas, including housing, economic development, transportation, arts and entertainment, and outdoor recreation.

A key component during the development of the plan was emphasis on gathering a breadth and depth of public input. To do so, the DDP held three public meetings, conducted a survey available online and at Dayton Metro Library branches, hosted an online discussion forum at MostMetro.com, and presented and gathered input at numerous community organizations' meetings. Between 80 and 100 people attended each public meeting, nearly 1,000 people completed the survey, and the forum generated 940 posts, with thousands more viewing the discussion threads. The themes that surfaced in the public input opportunities were instrumental when it came time to market the plan, especially when it came to supporting community buy-in for the plan and its recommendations.

The DDP had researched numerous economic development plans developed in other cities, and it started by turning to those cities to see how they rolled out their plans in terms of marketing and communications. Those efforts ranged from large-scale, expensive advertising campaigns to grassroots public relations-focused efforts. The DDP pulled together a team of marketing and communications professionals from its partners, including the City of Dayton, Five Rivers MetroParks and Citywide Development Corporation, along with some representatives of downtown marketing firms to evaluate this research and make some determinations about what would work best in the Dayton market.

Planning

Our strategy was to condense the many facets of the Greater Downtown Dayton Plan around a theme and message the community would support. The phrase “a new vision for Greater Downtown” was selected, as it referred to the way the plan encompassed a new, larger geographic area and its new way of recognizing urban development as synonymous with regional economic development.

To publicize and promote the plan, we developed these objectives:

- increase the community’s awareness about the importance of urban development in regional economic development
- host an event attended by at least 150 people
- work with our partners to communicate with a wide audience about the plan

We had two primary target audiences for this project. First was the DDP’s constituents, which consist of property and business owners in the Downtown Dayton Special Improvement District, as well as the constituents of our many partner organizations and other downtown stakeholders. Second, we wanted to communicate with the general public. We wanted the community to understand why the Greater Downtown Dayton Plan matters to them, wherever they live.

The DDP had secured grants from several community foundations for the development of the plan. Much of the balance of that funding was used for marketing the plan, with a final budget figure of \$20,000.

Execution

The DDP and its partners determined it was crucial to have a visual, graphic element to communicate the main recommendations in the plan. It was determined a video would be the best vehicle, while also serving as an effective social media tool. The DDP met with several video production firms located in and near downtown. We decided we liked the work of Kenny Mosher at Showdown Visual, but the firm’s rates were much higher than other estimates. However, Kenny agreed to work with the DDP and negotiated a rate that was within the budget. This rate was dependent on the DDP staff doing a lot of work to assist Kenny, such as writing the script, establishing a shooting schedule, setting up appointments and even renting a helicopter for aerial shots. The final video, which clocked in at approximately six minutes, was completed on a very aggressive schedule of less than a month, including everything from concept and script development to final editing. The DDP worked with community partners to post the video on their websites. More than 25 of those public and private sector partners did so, and the video was widely shared on Daytonians’ personal Facebook pages. The video has been viewed nearly 6,000 times on the DDP’s YouTube channel alone.

In addition, the DDP organized a kick-off event to formally launch the plan on May 18, 2010. It was held at the Dayton Racquet Club, which is on the top floor of downtown’s tallest building and has a bird’s-eye view of the city. The City of Dayton planning staff helped us print large posters of maps and renderings that illustrated key aspects and projects in the plan, which were hung in the windows with corresponding views. This allowed attendees to examine the renderings, then look out the window and see the actual location where the proposed project would be built. We also brought in Gene Krebs, co-director of the statewide urban redevelopment organization Greater Ohio, to give a presentation about the importance and future of urban revitalization. More than 350 people attended the kick-off event, a standing-room-only crowd that far exceeded our expectations. All major print, broadcast and electronic media in Dayton covered the event and ran or aired feature-length stories about the plan. Meetings also were held prior to the kick-off with the editorial board at major media outlets, which resulted in some positive editorials about the plan.

Also as part of this marketing and communications campaign, the DDP developed, printed and distributed some print and electronic collateral. A 24-page document that outlined in some detail the plan’s purpose, recommendations and implementation strategies was produced, along with a four-page overview. Both were

distributed at the kick-off event, and the four-page overview has been widely distributed throughout downtown and Dayton since. The DDP also built a website for the Greater Downtown Dayton Plan, www.downtowndayton.org/plan, which included detailed recommendations, maps and renderings, information about funding and implementation, news related to the plan, and much more. The DDP continues to maintain that site. We also sent several e-blasts about the plan that were then forwarded to our community partners, who were asked to send the information to their employees and networks. Two publications also were produced in conjunction with two partners: a four-page plan summary was produced in conjunction with CityWide Development Corp. and distributed in the *Dayton B2B* magazine, and a three-page overview was produced in conjunction with and in the widely distributed magazine *Discover the Dayton Region*.

Results

We believe we met all our objectives. While marketing and communications for the plan is ongoing, we believe the kick-off event and print and electronic materials developed in 2010 provided a successful jumpstart. The kick-off event was attended by more than double the original attendance goal, and nearly every community and business partner contacted and asked to help distribute information or post the video did so.

The production of the video, cost of the kick-off event, and printing and distribution of materials also was completed within budget and on a very aggressive schedule. A great deal of DDP staff time went into all these efforts, but the return on that investment has been very positive. Today, as implementation of the plan continues, we frequently hear positive comments about the plan and its materials, particularly the video.