



Main Street Mason City Strategic Communications Campaign

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Executive Summary

A strategic communications campaign is an essential component of improving public relations and increasing brand awareness for the Main Street Mason City (MSMC) organization. An effective campaign considers existing perceptions and awareness of the organization from external audiences, defines target audiences based on specific objectives, and tailors messages and campaign materials to those audiences in order to achieve desired outcomes. Through a partnership between the City of Mason City and the Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities, students from the University of Iowa's School of Journalism & Mass Communication developed a strategic communications campaign for MSMC. This final report synthesizes the work completed by two groups of students, who separately focused on two external audiences: businesses in the downtown district and the broad Mason City community.

MSMC is a non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization with a mission to “enhance, promote and preserve downtown Mason City as a diverse business, cultural and residential destination, for the benefit of the entire community.” As part of the larger statewide Main Street Iowa program, MSMC offers unique and vital resources to help promote downtown Mason City as a thriving place to live, shop, gather, and work.

However, like many other Main Street organizations throughout the state, MSMC faces challenges in terms of general awareness and understanding about their services and role in community and economic development. Businesses and residents often aren't aware of the many diverse functions of the organization, which range from assisting with business grants to hosting community events downtown. Additionally, businesses and residents often cannot differentiate MSMC from similar entities and organizations involved in community and economic development, such as the Mason City Chamber of Commerce and the City of Mason City. Compounding these issues, MSMC has experienced a considerable turnover in the executive director position, with six directors in the past eight years, which seems to have adversely effected public perception of the organization.

Because MSMC relies largely on private donations and volunteer hours, the lack of awareness and understanding, as well as negative perceptions, creates a threat to the organization's financial stability and overall success. The hiring of a new executive director and an increasingly engaged board of directors presents a timely opportunity to educate the community about the organization and to instill positive feelings about the MSMC brand.

Primary research was used to design effective campaign tactics, including a survey of residents about their feelings regarding MSMC, a review of online news coverage about the organization, interviews with MSMC staff and board members, and interviews with directors of several successful Main Street organizations across the state.

Of the 142 survey respondents, 90% indicated that they are aware of MSMC, 72% have a positive or somewhat positive attitude toward the organization, 24% are indifferent, and 3% have a negative or somewhat negative attitude. For an organization built around serving and improving the community, a much higher percentage of “positive” attitudes is both desirable and achievable.

Goals for the plan include:

- Increasing brand awareness within the community
- Increasing involvement from the community in the organization and its events
- Enhancing existing relationships with current downtown business partners
- Developing new relationships/partnerships with downtown businesses

The plan outlines specific tactics for achieving these goals. Key recommendations include:

- Use of promotional materials (brochures, window clings, etc.) to educate and engage downtown businesses
- More networking opportunities for downtown businesses
- Use of unpaid internships to increase staff capacity

Finally, the plan provides cost estimates and evaluation metrics for each of the proposed tactics.

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Situation Analysis

MSMC has a mission to build Mason City's downtown district as a popular destination for culture, living, and business. They are volunteer-based, and work with the existing downtown businesses to showcase Mason City as a unique hub, featuring activities that promote involvement by all citizens of the community. MSMC represents all businesses in the district without membership requirements or fees. MSMC is part of the larger Main Street Iowa program, which accepted Mason City as a registered community in 2004 and partners with over 50 communities in the state that, similar to Mason City, are committed to high standards for downtown economic development. Main Street Iowa is connected to a network of over 40 similar state programs similar across the country.

Internal Environment

MSMC is made up of a voluntary board of directors including a President, a Vice President, a Treasurer, a Secretary, and six directors from local businesses. They also have one executive director, the only paid position in the organization. In the last eight years, there have been six executive directors. This high turnover rate in recent years is one of the organization's largest internal impediments, as they rely on strong and lasting community relationships for success in terms of fundraising, volunteer support, and participation in events.

External Environment

In terms of raising funds from local businesses, a potential competitor would be the Mason City Chamber of Commerce, which collects annual funds from businesses to support marketing and event planning initiatives. The two organizations are otherwise complementary, collaborating often to achieve common goals.

Brand awareness is a significant challenge for MSMC. Downtown public events are a big part of how the organization brings the community together, with their biggest event being "Friday Night Live", a monthly event during the summer and early fall centered around live music and food from local vendors. Attendance at MSMC events is often high, which provides the organization a great opportunity to increase public awareness, although many attendees do not know who is hosting the event. The absence of signage showcasing MSMC likely contributes to the lack of awareness.

The organization does have a strong social media following, however, with 741 twitter followers and 2,841 Facebook likes as of May 2018.

Public Perception

An online search of news articles about MSMC turns up negatively-skewed stories on the first results page- local media outlets have reported on the high rate of turnover on the MSMC staff, as well as the loss of their website domain name resulting from a failure to renew on time, which resulted in the need for a new website address. Negative perceptions of the organization, paired with relatively low levels of support from local businesses and the community, contribute to difficulties in establishing MSMC as an important and impactful community partner, both in the eyes of local businesses and the community as a whole.

On the business end, local organizations often do not see MSMC as a different entity than the local Chamber of Commerce, which is a key challenge in their efforts to raise funds to support important initiatives.

Perhaps one issue MSMC will have to face among the community would be citizens' lack of interest in living downtown – in a 2014 Market Study compiled by MSMC, only 13% of surveyed community members said that they would consider living in downtown Mason City. Residential growth is considered a key component of downtown revitalization because it increases pedestrian activity and supports downtown businesses.

Core Problems

MSMC's core issue across the community is low brand awareness, while the core problem within the downtown business community is fractured relationships. Both of these issues can negatively affect fundraising and participation in events.

Publics

In order to address core problems, messaging should be tailored to defined publics, or communities of people that have direct or indirect association with MSMC. For this report, tactics are designed to communicate key messaging to two publics: downtown businesses and the broad Mason City community.

Downtown Mason City Businesses - Downtown businesses give the organization life and provide legitimacy through partnerships and support during events. They are often the source of volunteer hours for public events, which provides an opportunity for MSMC to increase exposure of these businesses. A strong relationship with this public will strengthen the MSMC organization and produce positive results that benefit the entire community.

Mason City Community - The Mason City community includes citizens living anywhere within a 20-minute radius of the city, a boundary set by MSMC in their 2014 Market Study. It is crucial that the

organization focus on this public, as members of the community sway public opinion of the organization, which impacts attendance at events and revenue-generating business sponsorships.

Conclusion

Low brand awareness in the community and low support from local businesses warrant concern for MSMC and the ability for them to achieve their goal of creating Mason City as a residential, business, and cultural hub. However, low brand awareness and low visibility of MSMC within the community also positions the organization in a unique and critical place to sway public perception in their favor.

Goals of our campaign are to increase brand awareness through an increased presence online and in the community, as well as continuing to strengthen the relationships with downtown Mason City businesses. Future research during this campaign should focus on getting more information about the public perception of the organization as well as what topics the community cares about in relation to the services provided by MSMC.

Research

In order to develop strategies and tactics that would help accomplish goals of the plan, baseline data was gathered to better understand awareness and perceptions of the organization. Correspondence with MSMC board members helped define strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities, and interviews with similar organizations in other communities helped establish some best practices.

Surveys

Surveying the population of the Mason City area was the primary form of gaining information about general perceptions of MSMC. The survey was posted multiple times on MSMC's Facebook page, as well as local business pages in an attempt to reach a wider audience. Through a broad survey, we hoped to reach a diverse group of participants living in the Mason City area regarding their interest and participation in MSMC events, their awareness and attitudes toward the organization, and more. Survey questions and results can be found in the Appendix.

After reaching 142 respondents on our survey, we found that most (87%) were between the ages of 25 and 64. Interestingly, most respondents were female (72%). The age and gender of respondents, indicating that the engaged audience may tend to have active lifestyles and be female, was considered in the design of the campaign and may be useful information for future marketing and communication efforts.

Most respondents (90%) had heard of the MSMC organization. Of the 142 survey respondents, 90% indicated that they are aware of MSMC, 72% have a positive or somewhat positive attitude toward the organization, 24% are indifferent, and 3% have a negative or somewhat negative attitude. For an organization built around serving and improving the community, a much higher percentage of "positive" attitudes is both desirable and achievable. This information suggest that MSMC could improve upon their "likability" through their activities and services and/or improve upon their current forms of promotion.

Survey results also indicate that respondents would like to see a downtown area that focuses on attracting local business owners while also acting as a key hub for local arts, music, and nightlife.

A survey of downtown businesses was also developed and distributed, although no responses were received.

MSMC Interviews

In order to gain more insight about MSMC and organizational goals from current board members, we

interviewed the current board president, vice president, and treasurer.

A couple of common themes emerged from these interviews- namely, relatively few businesses are actively engaged with the organization on a consistent basis (“less than a dozen” that have partnered with the organization for many years) and non-engaged businesses are generally unaware of the benefits and role of MSMC in downtown development and vitality. All three board members said that businesses are often are not able to differentiate MSMC and the Chamber of Commerce.

The board members suggested that the organization needed to meet regularly with downtown businesses, particularly those on the outskirts of the downtown area.

Expert Interviews

Phone interviews of other successful Main Street organizations throughout Iowa were conducted to learn how they have had success with events and promotions in their communities, as well as what worked for them to increase their public perception and brand awareness.

Main Street organizations targeted were suggested by MSMC Executive Director Emily Ginneberge based on their high event participation and positive cash flow. Organizations who had been working in their communities for decades were also targeted due to a proven track record that reflected lasting impact. The Main Street organizations contacted are located in Dubuque, Cedar Falls, Waterloo, State Center, and Mount Pleasant. Director or others in leadership roles were the points of contact and participated in phone interviews, providing insight regarding what has helped them run and operate a successful Main Street program in the state of Iowa.

Main Street directors reported that it was important to bring two sides, business and community, together in order to achieve a common goal. The interviews showed that acting as a liaison for small business owners and local consumers was a key factor in determining community reach and overall success for businesses collectively.

Another key suggestion was that social media time and resources were conducted primarily through Facebook, especially big-ticket events such as pub crawls and concerts. Dan LoBianco, Executive Director of Main Street Dubuque recommends that Main Street organizations “forget about every social media platform not named Facebook. It is above and beyond the best way to reach your local community because it’s the platform that everyone is using on a daily basis.” Other social media platforms and publications were rarely used to promote events, suggesting MSMC should consider focusing heavily on growing their Facebook followers while continually publishing relevant content on their Facebook business page.

Interviewees also indicated that family-oriented events and events centered on local “traditions” are an effective way to drive community participation and generate revenue. Additionally, a focus on local arts and music helps generate participation.

When planning these events, directors noted it was extremely important to keep costs low and to secure popular local sponsors who can offer something at the event, such as food or games. Some of the most successful business partnerships come from local banks, which rely on high levels of exposure and community involvement to support their marketing efforts.

Another point of success is collaborations with partnering organizations in the community. In particular, Chamber of Commerce organizations that co-brand with Main Street organizations can share in the costs, promotion, and management of events.

One possible and popular way to achieve a positive cash flow at these events is to sell alcohol to those of age, leaving room for potential partnerships with local breweries or bars. LoBianco of Dubuque stated that they “never ran a successful event that created a positive cash flow that *didn't* sell adult beverages to those of age.”

Finally, in order to attract more local business owners, MSMC could benefit from showcasing and highlighting open buildings for small business on a regular basis. Two of the groups interviewed carried out weekly free tours to prospective small business owners.

Strategy

Early on in our campaign, we identified that MSMC will have to increase awareness of who they are and what they do within the community. We focused on several different strategies to accomplish this goal, focusing on branding and engagement strategies, as well as organizational performance strategies to increase capacity for implementation.

Branding - MSMC's mission is to "enhance, promote and preserve downtown Mason City as a diverse business, cultural and residential destination, for the benefit of the entire community." The MSMC brand is to create a thriving downtown for everyone in the community. This brand is carried through the goals, objectives, and tactics below.

Engagement - This strategy is important as it relates to creating a positive attitude towards the MSMC brand. Specific tactics under this strategy are creating philanthropic events within the community and giving away drink and food tickets to community members that volunteer at events as an incentive to increase engagement through social media.

Organizational Performance - This strategy is tied overcoming internal hurdles that are impeding the brand from reaching its full potential. Specific tactics included under this strategy are creating a social media calendar to stay relevant online and hiring an intern to help execute marketing initiatives that current MSMC employees don't have time for.

Message Strategy

The core idea of this campaign is to spread the knowledge of the MSMC brand which prides itself on creating a thriving downtown for everyone. This campaign will use social media, and other branded materials/ merchandise that will be carried out through all tactics. Specifically, we will use banners, incentives to volunteer, philanthropic opportunities and create social media content with the help of an intern. All of these will help create awareness of the organization to the entire community therefore increasing involvement at events put on by MSMC which will be promoted through their Facebook Page as well other organizations such as those who donate to the organization.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Promote awareness of Main Street Mason City in the community

The vision of MSMC is to make downtown Mason City “a destination bound together by culture, business, and pride.” To accomplish this, the organization must have high awareness from everyone in the Mason City community, and this first goal intends to accomplish just that.

During our research process, we discovered that community members attending events often do not know that MSMC is hosting the event. By creating a banner and outdoor advertising materials (such as posters and flyers) using our sample image above, MSMC can raise awareness of their organization at events that community members are already enjoying, which in turn will also raise positive attitudes towards the organization.

- **Objective 1:** To have an effect on the awareness of Main Street Mason City in the Mason City community, specifically to increase awareness of the organization (98% of community members surveyed by December 2019).

This is an awareness objective. We consider this objective attainable because the awareness of the organization (according to our survey) is currently at 90%, and the organization should be able to increase that to nearly 100% of the community through a brand awareness communication campaign.

- **Tactic 1:** Create a banner and outdoor advertising materials to put up at Main Street Mason City events.

Banners should be made of durable material suitable for outdoor use so that banners can be reused at all events. Use zip-ties or ropes to secure banner. Two 4'x8' banners are recommended (for two entrances). Estimated total cost is about \$300 (\$150 per banner). Depending on the event, the banner should be hung at the entry gates, above the MSMC booth at the event, or on the main stage. The image below shows an example of the banner, although graphic design assistance is recommended for the final product.





— MAIN STREET IOWA —

MAIN STREET

— MASON CITY —



Main Street Mason City's Mission is to enhance, promote, and preserve downtown Mason City as a diverse business, cultural, and residential destination for the benefit of the entire community.

www.mainstreetmasoncity.com

- **Tactic 2:** Create merchandise for big events, advertising Main Street Mason City and sponsors.

We recommend that t-shirts are made for big-ticket events put on by MSMC in order to maximize the branding strategy. Some t-shirts created for events like Friday Night Live can be given away to volunteers. Outside of that, t-shirts can be sold at events with high attendance. Profit from the t-shirts can be used to pay for the upfront cost of buying the shirts, and excess funds can go towards other initiatives throughout the year. The upfront cost of creating t-shirts can also be offset through partnerships with businesses, whose logo can be included on the back of the shirt. The image below shows an example of a t-shirt design. Graphic design assistance is recommended for the final product. Estimated cost per shirt is about \$10-\$11. Recommend sale price is \$20 (volunteers are given free t-shirts). Use of local vendors is recommended.

We suggest starting out with purchasing 200 total koozies. We also recommend giving away koozies for free as they are such a small cost. Profits made from t-shirts and other promotional materials can be used to offset the costs of these koozies. Estimated cost per koozie is about \$2.

Branded water bottles would be great to sell events like Yoga in the Park, and could also be affiliated with any future events associating with cycling and local bike-rides. Estimated cost per koozie is about \$3.50.



- **Objective 2:** To have an effect on the acceptance of Main Street Mason City by the Mason City community, specifically to increase positive attitudes among community members (increase by 20% of community members surveyed by December 2019).

This is an acceptance objective. We consider this objective is attainable because positive attitudes towards the organization (according to our survey) is currently at 60%, and an increase of awareness will come acceptance through the campaign

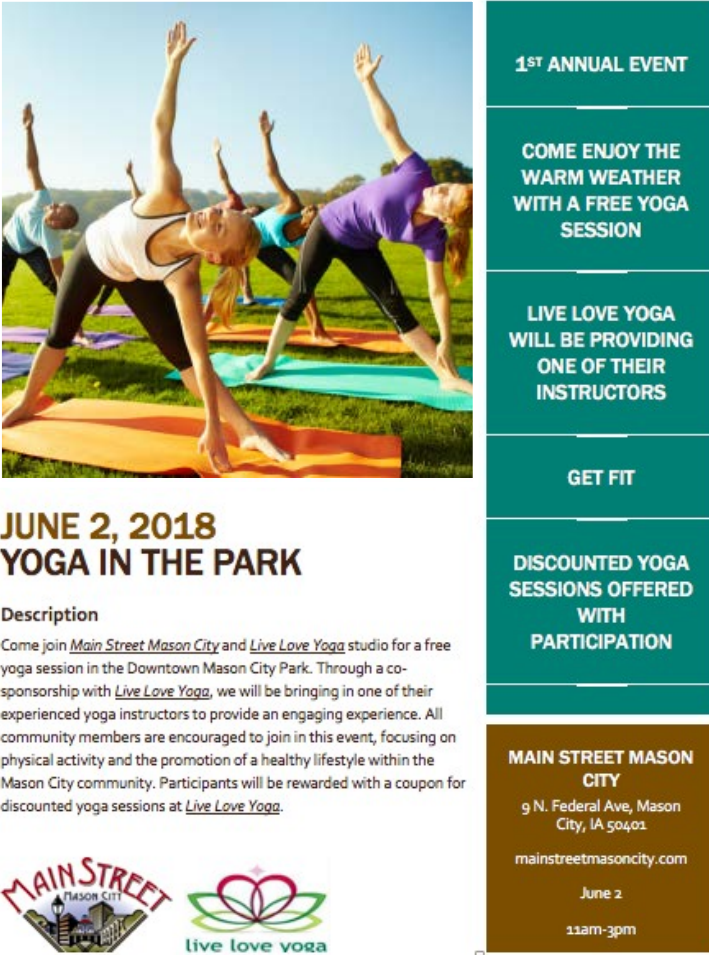
- **Tactic:** Create events within Mason City that nurture community engagement and pride. Cross-promote and coordinate with downtown businesses when possible.

Example- “Yoga in the Park”: MSMC will organize a community event to promote physical activity and healthy living. The organization will develop the event known as “Yoga in the Park” to encourage community members to engage in physical activities, building a stronger sense of healthy living within Mason City.

In our survey, a respondents answered that they’d like to see more events/activities dedicated to promoting physical activity. To that end, we decided to create a new event for MSMC called “Yoga in the Park”.

MSMC can partner with Live Love Yoga, a yoga studio in the downtown district, to put on the event. Live Love Yoga can send one instructor to lead the class, and the studio can offer a coupon for attendants to come to a class at their location, thus promoting their own brand in the process.

Advertising can be done for free by posting the flyer around the community, as well as posting it on social media to gain awareness.



1ST ANNUAL EVENT

COME ENJOY THE WARM WEATHER WITH A FREE YOGA SESSION

LIVE LOVE YOGA WILL BE PROVIDING ONE OF THEIR INSTRUCTORS

GET FIT

DISCOUNTED YOGA SESSIONS OFFERED WITH PARTICIPATION

MAIN STREET MASON CITY
9 N. Federal Ave, Mason City, IA 50401
mainstreetmasoncity.com
June 2
11am-3pm

JUNE 2, 2018
YOGA IN THE PARK

Description

Come join [Main Street Mason City](#) and [Live Love Yoga](#) studio for a free yoga session in the Downtown Mason City Park. Through a co-sponsorship with [Live Love Yoga](#), we will be bringing in one of their experienced yoga instructors to provide an engaging experience. All community members are encouraged to join in this event, focusing on physical activity and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle within the Mason City community. Participants will be rewarded with a coupon for discounted yoga sessions at [Live Love Yoga](#).

MAIN STREET MASON CITY

live love yoga

Goal 2: Increase involvement from community at Main Street Mason City events

Part of MSMC's vision is to create "promoted activities filled with synergy and involvement by all people". The second goal intends to increase involvement at events by the community. An issue identified in our situation analysis was that community members were only attending the largest Main Street events and had little involvement at the events. Our second goal and the related objectives aim to solve these issues and help MSMC meet their vision for the organization.

- **Objective 1:** To have an effect on acceptance, specifically to increase attendance at Main Street Mason City events (at least 70% of community members surveyed have attended at least one event by December 2019).

This is an acceptance objective. We consider this objective attainable because, according to our survey, attendance at most events is low (only 11% of surveyed community members responded that they "attend most events", 50% responded that they "attend some events"), and can easily be increased with a developed communications campaign.

- **Tactic 1:** Hire a marketing intern from the North Iowa Area Community College to handle social media promotions.

By hiring an intern from the local community college, MSMC will be able to more easily execute marketing plans by passing certain work down to the intern that current employees don't have the time to do. Not only will this help MSMC with internal organizational success, but it will also give the organization a better reputation amongst the community as a group that is giving back to Mason City and its residents.

Due to limited funding, in lieu to paying the employee we advise partnering with the North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) to offer academic credit for working 5-10 hours/week for the duration of a given semester.

NIACC offers an internship program for students called the Cooperative Education Internships Program. The program offers students educational credit to work on a limited basis during the school year. We recommend reaching out to the college before next summer to leave enough time to set up a full internship program for the 2019-2020 school year. Main Street Mason City can advertise the internship on the NIACC website using the flyer we created for the job posting.



Position: Main Street Mason City Marketing Intern
Start Date: ASAP

Description: Are you a tech-savvy, hard-working communications expert looking to get more involved in your community? We've got just the job for you! Main Street Mason City is seeking a student from the North Iowa Area Community College to come join our team as a Marketing Intern. This employee works to promote the brand in the community through social media relations, and in-house marketing efforts. Think you fit the bill? Check out our qualifications below and apply if you're interested! We look forward to hearing from you.

Duties: Here are the key duties for our Marketing Intern –

- Create content for social media platforms
- Generate attention for upcoming events in local media outlets through earned and paid advertisements
- Find and foster sponsorship relationships with other companies
- Create in-house marketing materials (i.e. table tents, chalkboard art, posters, etc.)
- Other marketing/communications duties as assigned

Qualifications: Here are the key qualifications for our Brand Marketing Specialist:

- Experience in social media content creation
- Experience in general advertising/marketing/communications
- Current student at NIACC

Weekly Hours: 5-10

Wage: 2 Semester Hours of Academic Credit at the North Iowa Area Community College

Interested in helping Main Street Mason City as we grow in the Mason City community? Send us a resume and a cover letter letting us know why you're the best candidate, and we'll get back to you if we think you'd be a good member of our team! Main Street Mason City is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

- Tactic 2:** Create an internal social media content calendar to consistently promote upcoming events.

Creating a social media calendar is an easy way to stay relevant online. By planning out the week, month, or year ahead using a social media management tool such as Hootsuite.com, MSMC can ensure frequent posting. This, in turn, will create a larger following of the organization on platforms that respondents of our primary research survey noted that they use most frequently (i.e. Facebook). This tactic could also be passed down to the proposed intern.

Creating detailed and creative social posts will result in more online engagement from community members. Specifically focusing on the social media accounts community members engage with the most will result in higher quality posts and better perception of the events posted about.

Tips for engaging Facebook posts include: ask a question to elicit responses; keep it short; give a clear call to action; offer valuable information; provide links; be positive; and use images.

The images below and to the right illustrate a sample weekly social media calendar and sample Facebook post.

Main Street Mason City presents the annual Friday Night Live festival this weekend in Central Park of downtown Mason City from 6:00-10:00 p.m. bring the family and enjoy free live music, food and drink! #FridayFun #FridayNightLive



Like Comment

Bailey Doyle Cant't wait, this is my favorite event of the whole summer!

Like · Reply · 1m

Write a comment... [emojis]

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p><u>#SundayRead:</u></p> <p>Share a recent blog post written by an intern</p>	<p><u>#MotivationMonday:</u></p> <p>Start your follower's week off right with some motivational quotes/photos</p>	<p><u>#TjoTuesday:</u></p> <p>Answer community member FAQ or give tips on helping the community</p>	<p><u>#WisdomWednesday:</u></p> <p>Give followers advice related to your industry like ways to help the community or volunteering/donating</p>	<p><u>#ThrowbackThursday:</u></p> <p>Share the favorite memories of your business, encourage your follows to share theirs too!</p>	<p><u>#FridayFun</u></p> <p>Show followers what events are happening this weekend, get them excited!</p>	<p><u>#SmallbusinessSaturday</u></p> <p>Use this day to promote local business you have partnerships with</p>

- **Objective 2:** To have an effect on action, specifically to increase volunteering at Main Street Mason City events by community members (increase to 50% of community members surveyed by December 2019).

This is an action objective. We consider this objective attainable because volunteering at events is low (according to our survey) only 22% of respondents participate in volunteering efforts. Through our unique brand awareness campaign this number can be doubled.

- **Tactic:** Incentivize community members to volunteer at events by giving them drink and food tickets during that event.

MSMC is an organization that largely relies on volunteerism from the community at large. One easy way to get Mason City community members to help out at large events without paying them would be to incentivize volunteerism through food and drink vouchers. Not only will this get more people to volunteer at events, but those community members will also stay at the event after their shift is over to use their newly acquired vouchers. Examples of volunteer vouchers are shown below.



Volunteer Voucher

Good for one food item at today's event



Volunteer Voucher

Good for one drink from the beer tent at today's event



Goal 3: For downtown businesses, increase awareness of the resources provided by Main Street Mason City

- **Objective 1:** To have an effect on awareness of Main Street Mason City services and resources, specifically to increase awareness from downtown business (increase of 50% of positive responses through business surveys by December 2019).
- **Tactic:** Create and distribute a brochure describing services and resources available to downtown businesses through Main Street Mason City, such as grants and sponsorship opportunities.

Developing a way to show people what all the organization has to offer is crucial. Brochures are tangible pieces that businesses can keep and reference as needed. An example of what might be included in the brochure is shown below.



FRONT



BACK

Goal 4: Enhance business relationships with downtown business partners.

- **Objective 1:** To have an effect on engagement of local businesses, specifically to increase the number of new businesses actively involved in the organization by 5 each year.
- **Tactic 1:** Host monthly networking events that encourage downtown businesses to come together and network with one another and engage in meaningful conversation with the Main Street Mason City executive director.

Encouraging people to share their thoughts and ideas about programs and events that the businesses would like to see encourages businesses to be more involved in the organization, including volunteers and sponsors of events. If more businesses are involved in the process of networking, engagement from both sides will potentially result in a successful partnership from both parties.

- **Tactic 2:** Invite downtown businesses to Main Street Mason City offices (or another convenient location) for one-on-one meetings with staff and/or board members.

The opportunity to have a professional and personal one on one time with the executive director of the organization and a few of the board members will forge stronger partnerships with downtown businesses. Hosting the coffee and conversations on the second floor of the Chamber of Commerce building is recommended. Steps to take to prepare for this encounter are:

- *Send out invitations*
- *Print out resources pamphlet*
- *Purchase the coffee and bagels*
- *Have a copy of the mission and purpose of the organization on hand*
- *Be ready with questions for what the businesses would like to see*
- *Have informative responses for any questions they might have*

Sample Email for New Partners:

Dear _____,

My name is Emily Ginneberge and I am the Executive Director of Main Street Mason City. I am reaching out to you with some promotional material about what we do as an organization. For the past 14 years, Main Street Mason City has been working to improve our downtown district in any way we are able. We are a non-membership organization; that means if you are in our district, our services are available to you. We offer things such as loans for business renovation, grants for business innovation, and tax abatement help. We are excited to be on the search for new community partners and look forward to working with you in the near future!

Best,

Emily Ginneberge
Executive Director, Main Street Mason City

Tactic 3: Create window clings for Main Street Mason City investors and partners and encourage them to show their support for the organization by displaying them at their businesses.

Window clings for demonstrate that MSMC values their investors and business partners, and that businesses invest in their local community by supporting MSMC. Visible recognition will encourage other businesses to invest and support the organization. Estimated cost is less than \$1 per window cling. An example of a window cling is shown below. Alternatives to the “Proud Partner” caption might be “Proud Investor” or “Main Street Mason City thanks this business for investing in our community”



Implementation

Timeline for January 2019- December 2019

January - April

- Social media:
 - Post about upcoming event information (Example: St. Patrick's Day Bar Crawl)
 - Use example of content calendar (provided) as a guide for weekly posting.
 - Hootsuite is another social media management tool that can be used as well.
 - Give Facebook followers a “sneak peek” of the banner being created for all MSMC events to get them excited.
- Advertisement:
 - Spread knowledge to community members through social media posts and other branded materials (flyers, t-shirts, etc.).
- Business Relations:
 - Print and distribute brochures
 - Begin making appoints with business for one-on-one meetings
 - Hold first monthly networking event

May - July

- Social media:
 - Post, post, post!!
 - Friday Night Live is coming up and social media should cover all aspects of it.
 - Volunteer opportunities, simple information about the event, etc.
 - Include posts for community “Yoga in the Park” event
 - Get in contact with local yoga instructor about donating an hour of his/her time for the event
- Advertisement:
 - Contact local media to air/print/post about upcoming events like Friday Night Live or Yoga in the Park.
- Intern:
 - Create internship job posting
 - Contact North Iowa Area Community College in May 2019 to set up an internship program starting in the August 2019 - May 2020 school year.
- Business Relations:
 - Print and distribute promotional window clings

August - October

- Social media:
 - Continue intern posts'
 - Any other information that might be relevant to the community.

October - December

- Send out additional survey to community members (similar to the one conducted by U of Iowa students) and compare results of acceptance and awareness of the organization to the original survey.

During the entire year

- Pitch local newspaper a stories on people/events to generate knowledge and excitement about the organization

Evaluation

1) To gain a better understanding of an increase of awareness the organization, distribute a survey at the first Friday Night Live Series asking the following questions:

- On a scale of 1/10 how familiar are you with Main Street Mason City?
- Do you feel that you understand the capabilities of the organization (Yes, Somewhat, No)?
- How would you rate the organization's branding? (1/10)

The survey will also be distributed at the final concert, asking the same questions. Compare the results to see if awareness increased: the goal should be a positive increase in all 3 questions by at least 20%.

2) Tracking increased social media engagement on a per-month basis, with the following goals:

- Likes: increase avg. amount of likes on Facebook posts by 10% July-September
- Shares: increase avg. amount of shares per posts by 10 % each July-September
- Followers: increase Facebook followers by 10% July-September

3) To evaluate participation at MSMC events, get a rough estimate of attendance at the first Friday-Night-Live concert & keep track of total attendance for every event- the goal is to increase this attendance on a monthly basis.

- 1st month: 10% increase (June compared to May)
- 2nd month: 15% increase (July compared to June)
- 3rd month: 20% increase (August compared to July)

4) To evaluate the objective to see an increase in volunteers, compare volunteer numbers to previous years, with a goal of 25% increase by the end of August (for annual events).

Appendix

MSMC Board Member survey questions

- What is your relationship to Main Street Mason City?
- How many downtown businesses sponsor Main Street Mason City?
- What issues do you see within the organization?
- Can you tell me about the relationship between downtown businesses and Main Street Mason City?
- How can Main Street Mason City improve relationships with businesses?

Downtown Business survey questions

- What is your perception of Main Street Mason City (MSMC)?
- Do you know the difference between the Chamber of Commerce and Main Street?
- How likely are you to donate to Main Street?
- When was the last time you attended an MSMC event?
- Do you feel that Main Street has a strong social media presence?
- In your opinion, are the fundraisers beneficial?
- How has MSMC motivated you to volunteer?
- How strong is your relationship with MSMC?
- How long have you been a partner with MSMC? (in years and months)
- What is your annual revenue for your company?
- Thank you for giving us feedback! If you would like to participate in additional surveys to help increase business relations with Main Street Mason City, please include your name, phone number, and email address.

MSMC volunteer survey questions

- How long have you been a volunteer?
- How would you describe your experience as a volunteer?
- How did you hear about volunteering with Main Street Mason City (MSMC)?
- How likely are you to volunteer again for MSMC?
- How likely are you to encourage friends/family to volunteer?
- What did you do as a volunteer?
- How positive is your perception of MSMC?
- Did you feel appreciated by MSMC as a volunteer?
- What is your age?
- What is your gender?
- If you are interested in further questions about increasing volunteer participation for MSMC, please leave your name, email address and phone number. Thank you for taking this survey!

Community survey questions and results

1. What is your age?
 - 18 - 24 (8%)
 - 25 - 34 (24%)
 - 35 - 44 (23%)
 - 45 - 54 (18%)
 - 55 - 64 (20%)
 - 65 - 74 (6%)
 - 75 - 84
 - 85 and up

2. What is your gender?
 - Male (28%)
 - Female (72%)
 - Other

3. What is your race?
 - White (93%)
 - Black/African American (2%)
 - American Indian/Alaska Native
 - Asian (2%)
 - Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - Other (2%)

4. Have you heard of Main Street Mason City?
 - Yes (91%)
 - No (9%)

- If so: What is your attitude towards the organization?
 - Positive (60%)
 - Somewhat positive (12%)
 - Indifferent (24%)
 - Somewhat negative (2%)
 - Negative (1%)

5. What is your participation level in events around Mason City?
 - Attend and volunteer at events (22%)
 - Attend most events (11%)
 - Attend some events (52%)
 - Do not attend events (13%)

- If (i, ii, iii): Who do you attend events with?
 - Family/significant other (74%)
 - Friends (24%)
 - Alone (2%)

6. What kind of community events would interest you most? Select all that apply.
 - Family-oriented/child friendly (20%)
 - Music (26%)

- Shopping/dining (21%)
 - Entrepreneurial (7%)
 - Arts (20%)
 - Other (4%)
7. Which of these do you prefer most?
- Free event open to the public (55%)
 - Small price ticketed events based around community artists and local businesses (33%)
 - Higher price ticketed events with popular featured artists or keynote speakers (12%)
8. Please rank the following social media platforms based on how often you use them (number 1 being most used, number 6 being least used):
- Facebook (81%)
 - Twitter (5%)
 - Instagram (4%)
 - Snapchat (7%)
 - LinkedIn (2%)
 - Pinterest (1%)
9. How likely are you to share content relevant to your community?
- Extremely likely (49%)
 - Slightly likely (41%)
 - Slightly unlikely (6%)
 - Extremely unlikely (4%)
10. Please rank the following outlets based on which you'd prefer to find information about community events:
- Social media (83%)
 - Television (7%)
 - Radio (3%)
 - Local promotional materials [flyers, posters, etc.] (2%)
 - Online ad placements
 - Newspapers (6%)
11. How often do you visit downtown Mason City?
- Every day (26%)
 - More than once per week (30%)
 - Once per week (18%)
 - A few times per month (19%)
 - Less than once per month (7%)
12. In what ways would you like to see Main Street Mason City improve the downtown district? Select all that apply.
- Foster and create a stronger entrepreneurial environment (12%)
 - Create a stronger sense of community pride (14%)
 - Increase consumer traffic (13%)
 - Attract more local businesses (19%)
 - Highlight and showcase the district's unique culture through creative events (13%)

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- Create a safe and inclusive downtown environment (13%)
 - Attract more people to relocate to the city (12%)
 - Other (4%)
- If “Other”: Please explain any other ways you’d like to see Main Street Mason City improve the downtown district. (Most relevant quotes:)
- “Clearer signage for some businesses/buildings.”
 - “Develop more housing that is downtown with subsequent amenities.”
 - “Rent incentives that make it reasonable for a new business to take a risk. Less professional offices and more food and retail open after 5pm.”
 - “It would be nice to have a place ideal for college students and young adults.”
 - “More fitness events/activities (i.e. yoga in the park, community dog walks, community bike rides, zumba in the park, etc.)”
 - “Encourage people of the community to go out and socialize; create activities for children (all seasons); host events and fundraisers for a cause or organization; events focused on holidays; better advertising for upcoming events.”

Expert Interview Quotes

Dan LoBianco, Executive Director of Main Street Dubuque:

- “The key to our success is developing strong public and private sector partnerships.”
- “Don’t try and do everything in 1-5 years. Create an on-going, long-term plan that includes benchmarks and goals for both the immediate and distant future.”
- “It’s really important to show off your historical heritage and preservation.”
- “We’ve never ran a successful event that created a positive cash flow that *didn’t* sell adult beverages to those of age.”
- “You should always have merchandise to sell each and every event you put on. T-shirts, coasters, bracelets, posters, any type of cheap swag that has your name on it will work just fine.”
- “Forget about every social media platform not named Facebook. It is above and beyond the best way to reach your local community because it’s the platform that everyone is using on a daily basis.”
- “Be creative in the events that you offer and don’t stick to the same old things. We always switch it up and this year we’ll offer a range of events from a mini-putt bar crawl to a pickleball tournament.”
- “Find a central location where you can hang a banner throughout the entire Summer. The banner should feature your name in big letters and should tell people how to contact you and where they can learn more information.”

Everett Halstead, Executive Director of Main Street State Center:

- “Build your environment, so you can sustain the image you want to present to your community.”
- “Do positive things, people notice. In return, you will see a large gain in community involvement.”
- “Try and work with investors to help build your brand. Do whatever your community wants to incentivize a strong community awareness.”

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