

FINAL DELIVERABLE

Title Strategic Communication Campaign
for Manning, Iowa to Recruit New
Residents

Completed By Ali Ashby, Andi Kurtz, Madison
Offenburger, Chase Bushaw

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Instructor Frank Durham

Community Partners City of Manning, Main Street Manning

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Provost's Office of Outreach and Engagement
The University of Iowa
111 Jessup Hall
Iowa City, IA, 52241
Phone: 319.335.0684
Email: outreach-engagement@uiowa.edu
Website: <http://outreach.uiowa.edu/>

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Ali Ashby

Andi Kurtz

Madison Offenburger

Chase Bushaw

Executive Summary

Manning, Iowa, is a proud, progressive community in Western Iowa. The small town was labeled by The Carroll *Daily Times Herald* as “arguably the most innovative, hard-charging small town in Iowa.” This plan provides structure and guidelines for the Manning city council, and more specifically to the communications team in order to implement new strategies to increase awareness of the town with the hope of gaining residents. The plan targets three key campaign publics: IKM Manning School District Alumni, young families from 25-40, and retirees.

Introduction

This plan covers objectives related to Manning's need for improved communications to induce population growth in the town. Manning needs better and more modern communication tactics to draw in people from out of town who are looking for a small, charming new home.

Background

Manning is a small, charming, rural community located in west-central Iowa that is known for its progressive government. When you walk down the red-bricked Main Street Manning, you'll hear music playing in the background. Manning residents will know your name before you know theirs and won't hesitate to say hello and start a conversation with you. There is an overwhelming sense of community support from the citizens to the local government.

If you stop in Deb's Café, a staple in the community for breakfast and coffee, you are greeted by the national anthem door chime and the friendly faces of the staff and customers. You'll notice a round table straight back from the door that is full of local farmers coming and going from 6am until 10am.

South of Deb's Cafe is the local retirement home. With a wrap-around porch and rocking chairs, the older generation is able to sit out and enjoy the new Main Street Manning and all it has to offer.

The City of Manning and Main Street Manning are currently in the process of revamping their Main Street district. With the help of the Main Street Iowa project, they have repaired and enhanced many of the Main Street storefronts and added several new city amenities.

Residents and those that visit Manning are able to explore several new trails and parks and attractions like the German Hausbarn, the Leet-Hassler Farmstead, and the Trinity Church. Because of its history as a railroad boom town, Manning also emphasizes their trestle bridge as an attraction. Directly in front of the trestle bridge is a large sculpture spelling out I-O-W-A that allows for a picture-perfect moment.

Manning embraces their history and uses it to tell a story about the town itself. Because of its start as a German settlement, several festivals celebrate Manning's heritage throughout the year, and they also bring together families and people of all ages to join in and participate.

Despite its many successes and small-town charm, Manning, like many other rural communities, is facing is the "brain drain" affecting rural America. Brain drain refers to young people leaving their small hometown to move to the big cities. Brain drain has been increasing since the mid-1990s, however lately, experts have identified a new theme of "brain *gain*." Brain gain is the

counter of brain drain, as in, people from the cities are starting to and willing to move to rural American counties. A lot of this has to do with the what the town has to offer. In a study done by Gundars Rudzitis, the factors that draw people to rural towns are employment opportunities, the social environment, outdoor recreation, the pace of life, and the scenery and climate (Amenities Increasingly Draw People to the Rural Midwest).

While Manning has had success in many of these categories, outsiders are often unaware of this Iowan town. While the city itself has limited opportunities for millennials who have just graduated, they have several amenities for people looking to settle into a routine or to establish their family in one location. Communicating these opportunities would help draw this demographic back to Manning.

Manning's website is set up to tell visitors about everything that they have the ability to do for their residents instead of talking about how the things they have done in the community have affected the residents in a positive way. Existing videos show current residents talking about Manning and how nice it is to live there. It would be beneficial to also have a video showing a project currently being done in the Manning community and how residents are reacting to it or how it's impacted them in a positive manner. This could be set up over several short videos including different members of the community. This would show a story to potential newcomers and help them understand different walks of life in Manning.

While the website has a business focus, one thing they could do to capitalize on the small business atmosphere there is to put the businesses story on their website. Another thing that would be beneficial for Manning's website is to show housing and job opportunities for potential newcomers to the community.

The mission and vision statements for Manning demonstrate that the community is forward-thinking and actively working toward a better future. Throughout the state, Manning is known as having an extremely involved government that plans projects and accomplishes them regardless of the obstacles.^A Their main goal with the forward-thinking government is "to preserve and revitalize [the] historic downtown and to stimulate business" in order to benefit the town for the present and the future generations.^B

Environment

The environment surrounding Manning reflects its business and education priorities, geographical location, and the local media. These aspects of Manning's environment are important features that will attract and impact incoming residents.

Manning is a small, rural town that is certified as a Main Street Community, which allows the community of Manning to receive grants and funding for the maintenance of their historic Main Street. In 2015, the inaugural year for the award, Manning received the Iowa Small Business Administration Community of the Year award. Manning won against cities of all sizes and was highlighted for demonstrating ideal collaborative community efforts to support small business success. (Manningia.com) This has contributed to the “progressive” (Manning Moves) nature of Manning by allowing them to renovate the town square, as well as implement a series of walking and hiking trails around the town.

A problem they seem to have at this point is there is no housing for people to move into. In order for people to consider moving to a new town, they will want to know where they will live. With the limited number of housing options at the moment that is hard for people. Manning needs to hire contractors to build homes around Manning, even if they are small, quaint houses. This is also important because right now, there is no housing information about Manning on any website. This is something that affects what Manning has to offer newcomers, as well as if these newcomers will even consider Manning in the first place.

Their geographical location offers a built-in benefit for Manning. Manning has close access to many different towns and experiences. The short commute to and from these towns also allows parents to spend more time at home rather than on the road. Not only is Manning between several counties, but they are also in the middle of two main cities on I-80. Manning is an hour and a half away from both Omaha, Nebraska and Des Moines, Iowa. Being so close to these metropolitans gives residents of Manning access to several amenities that large cities have to offer, with the luxury of being able to leave and reside in a quiet town.

Manning’s school district adds a lot to their progressive environment as well. Located in Manning’s city limits, IKM Manning high school brings together students from Kirkman, Irwin, Manilla, and Manning. As a leader in the STEM program, the high school also implements a 21st century learning environment. This environment supports a more collaborative approach to learning rather than the original, individual desks that are secluded from peers. With an average of 22 students per class, the high school allows one-on-one attention to each student in order to get the most benefit from school. Their school system has state -of-the-art equipment and amenities that you would find in a big city, just in a small town.

Manning’s online environment is an important indicator of the environment within the city. People from out of town will go to Manning’s online presence prior to going to the town itself, therefore the online and in-person representations need to be synonymous. Right now, their website is mainly focused on business administration, showing the business plans and the economic environment as the main focus. This doesn’t show the true environment and activities that Manning has to offer. Rather than having communication channels (e.g., Facebook and their

website) for the people who live there and are interested in living there, they seem to focus on business and economic aspects.

Target Publics

We determined Manning's three main target publics based on the current amenities that the midwestern town can currently offer newcomers, and evaluated the existing assets with respect to a study conducted by Rural Development Perspectives (RDP). RDP's research says that the least important factor in moving to a small town was job opportunities, but that social environment at 47%, physical environment at 42%, and the pace of lifestyle at 22% were determined to be the leading factors for moving to a small town. Our research, combined with RDP's, lead to us determining that Manning offers both the social and physical environment components as well the pace of lifestyle many people are seeking. In addition, we expect that IKM Manning alumni, young families ages 25-40 with young children under the age of ten, and retirees would be the most appropriate target publics for this small midwestern town.

IKM Manning Alumni 25-35

It is commonly thought that many people who grow up in small towns want to "leave and never come back" after high school. While this may be true initially, we believe that once Manning IKM alumni get married and start families, Manning can offer them much more than they realize.

The high school alumni population has the opportunity to become "big fish in a small pond." Meaning, they've already established connections within the town which can ultimately lead them to leadership opportunities on a shorter path. In order to bring this demographic back to Manning, it is important for the community to make these alumni feel valued. Homecoming events and alumni outreach are important in order to remind Manning graduates just how appreciated and celebrated they are in their hometown. Ideally, an alumni association would provide additional resources and perks for former residents of Manning persuading them to come back to Manning for a visit.

Recent grads are more likely to be influenced by social media, so it will be beneficial to reach them digitally. We expect that alumni will look to sources like Facebook, *the Carroll Daily Times Herald*, Carroll Broadcasting Company, *Manning News Journal*, and IKM-Manning, City of Manning, and a private site run by local resident David Kusel. These sources may have been previously accessed by alumni while living in Manning and are familiar and credible sources. With this being said, the content that these outlets produce and distribute will be even more influential for this particular audience. When compared to our other two target audiences, alumni may be more heavily influenced by sources from the Manning area since they are outlets that likely require previous knowledge. These outlets will become projects and tactics under

objectives #1 and #3, which focus on enhancing the city's communication tactics and digital presence on social media as well as redeveloping the Manning website.

We suggest that the city of Manning website (objective #3) and the IKM-Manning High School website (objective #1) undergo a thorough redesign since alumni will be heavily utilizing both sources. We expect that these objectives will enhance the websites' overall visual appeal and functionality while also increasing traffic. The *Carroll Daily Times Herald*, Carroll Broadcasting Company, and the *Manning News Journal* are expected to be accessed regularly by alumni and are excellent sources for Manning promotions and advertisements. Similarly, since Facebook will be a useful outlet, an official alumni Facebook page and group should be created to encourage conversation among alumni. On the other hand, the Manning Chamber of Commerce, Mainstreet Manning, and City of Manning pages should be updated monthly so that all information is current, accurate, and useful.

Young Families Aged 25-40 with children under age 10

The next target audience is young families, specifically those with parents within the age range of 25-40. Life in Manning has the potential to be the ideal location for young families who are looking to raise their children in a safe and friendly community. One of the most attractive things for families is a good school system, Manning offers that with the IKM Manning School District located right in the heart of Manning. IKM Manning is proud of its technologically advanced classrooms, STEM program and smaller class size- some key components in developing successful students. According to a study conducted by the University of Idaho (AUTHOR, DATE), jobs alone are not the sole reason people live in rural areas, but more the social environment and amenities offered to them.

We expect that young families with children under the age of ten will find Manning the ideal location for their families to grow and prosper. Manning is home to a 21st-century high school, brand new hospital, and several other amenities that we expect this audience to value. Very similar to our first target audience, this younger generation should be targeted through social media and other digital platforms.

When considering relevant media for our second target audience, we expect that sources such as the Manning website and IKM-Manning high school website will be especially effective in providing the necessary knowledge newcomers may be seeking. Because of this, revamping the Manning website and keeping the IKM-Manning website up to date will be exceptionally critical since these outlets will be at the top of the list of a new resident. Similarly, young parents between the ages of 25-40 will be particularly interested in the education system as well as other amenities that may be beneficial to their young children. It will be integral for both websites to provide useful information for this audience as well as other information that shows Manning is a family friendly community.

Apart from our other two audiences, we expect that young families would be especially interested in both the Main Street America and the Iowa Economic Development/Main Street Iowa websites. We expect that this audience will be interested in the future and development of Manning since it is where their children will be growing up. With this in mind, the Manning website should include working links to these sites as well as other Main Street/Economic information in relation to Manning. On the other hand, sources like Facebook, the *Carroll Daily Times Herald*, and Carroll Broadcasting Company will also be useful when it comes to providing location specific information, advertising, and resources for young families and our other two target publics.

Retirees

The last target public, retirees, have the potential to appreciate Manning the most out of all categories. Many retirees crave the peace and quiet that small towns provide, and Manning adds a multitude of amenities for this age group. The historical sites in the town such as the German Hausbarn, Veterans Memorial Wall and the Arts and Antiques Tour are helpful in getting retirees to come visit, and could potentially lead them to stay. Ideally, retirees would enjoy all that Manning has to offer for the: socializing, recreation, and volunteering. Additionally, Manning has its own hospital and assisted living areas for when needed.

Upon retirement, the majority of retirees are looking for a different pace of life as well as tourism opportunities. Luckily, Manning offers both the tourism and leisurely lifestyle that this audience is seeking as well as an exceptional retirement home on top of several other amenities. In addition, it will be important to reach this audience through traditional media outlets as well as digitally.

When contemplating relevant media that retirees will be likely to utilize, we expect that they will consider bulletins and other traditional media outlets as some of their top choices. Other traditional sources such as the *Carroll Daily Times Herald* and the Carroll Broadcasting Company should also be used for advertising and creating awareness of relevant opportunities. In order to be most effective, these materials should be distributed in nearby areas like Carroll and Dennison in order to widen our reach to retirees outside the Manning area. When compared to what a young family might consider to be beneficial, these sources are something that are familiar to this particular audience and have likely been accessed in the past. However, with this being said, Facebook and the Manning website will still be valuable outlets, making a revamp of the Manning website and regularly updating official pages even more imperative.

The Plan

Problem Statement

There are too many people leaving Manning and not enough people coming resulting in the population decrease.

Goal Statement

This plan will provide a communication strategy to bring awareness of the town of Manning and promote what it has to offer for retaining and recruiting residents.

Objective One: Communication Tactics to Increase Engagement from Manning High School Alumni

Target Public: *Manning High School Alumni*

Project 1: Create and enhance social media presence to better serve target alumni

1. Research other high school alumni websites. Example: [UMKC Alumni](#)
2. Designate one individual to work on alumni outreach via social media.
3. Create either alumni website similar to the example listed above or an active Facebook page.
4. Use the website and/or Facebook page to recognize alumni for their adult achievements in a monthly spotlight.
5. Bring back old photos and memories on the site in a “yearbook style” to encourage alumni to reminisce.

Project 2: Homecoming events aimed towards alumni

1. Create a small alumni relations committee that will plan multiple events for alumni during IKM Manning Homecoming
Example: Tailgating, banquet, float in the parade, etc.
2. Use social media pages (see project one) to advertise homecoming events and place emphasis on alumni attendance
3. Find a list of alumni contact information and reach out to them individually inviting them to the events.
4. Interview alumni at the events asking them about coming back to Manning, what they look for when moving, etc.
5. Showcase the amenities that Manning has now that they didn't in previous years: Innovative school system, Hospital, Main Street Manning.

Project 3: Alumni Newsletter

1. Create a consistent plan for developing and releasing an alumni newsletter
2. Gather alumni mailing address' and name changes if possible.
3. Decide if the newsletter will be monthly, quarterly or yearly.
4. Layout the events, news and stories that could be featured in publications within the first few releases to ensure there will be enough content.
5. Create consistent outline for the newsletters and make an initial draft.
6. Send out first completed draft to Alumni one week before the 1st of the newsletter month.

Objective 2: Heighten the awareness of the opportunities and amenities that Manning has to offer.

Target Public: *Young families aged 25-40, Retirees*

Project 1: Housing Project

1. Create Zillow listings for houses that are on the market right now, as well as plots of land that available to build on. Make sure these listings are searchable by "Manning, IA."
2. Send those listings to surrounding newspapers to let people know what's available in Manning
3. Research and talk to local construction companies to build new houses in the area and help distribute their information. This could be an opportunity to create jobs for people within a small business.
4. 2 months prior to having to contract five new homes, send out informational flyers to communities near Manning, newspapers near Manning, and Manning's social media
5. Stay up to date with Zillow listings in order to maximize the effectiveness of those listings.

Project 2: Job Awareness

1. Put businesses in charge of posting their jobs to websites such as ziprecruiter or Indeed.com (Stick to one website)
2. Keep "Manning" as a keyword to be able to search on the Job websites.
3. Put job listings in newspapers around the area. This will help make Manning more visible.
4. Post job listings in high traffic areas around town.
 - a. Ex: The Marketplace
5. Local businesses should sending out new information to the city once a month about jobs, what's new in their business, and any opportunities for growth.

Project 3: Emphasis on Education

1. Create flyers about the 21st Century classrooms and 3D printers
2. Distribute flyers to surrounding newspapers to put in their paper a week before registration
3. Print flyers to distribute during Homecoming Week (Objective 1)
4. Make the Education tab more central on the Manning site
5. Include pictures on the Manning website
6. Create a central theme about IKM Manning and implement it into the school's site
 - a. Ex: Fronting Success
7. Emphasize the amenities you do offer (humble brags)
8. Research what's drawing families to other school districts
9. Talk about special education programs as well as exceptional education programs in more detail.

Project 4: Increase Manning's presence in surrounding communities

1. Talk to the surrounding newspapers in Carroll, Denison, Des Moines, etc.
2. Figure out cost for a weekly column space.
3. Once you decide on the size of the column, start utilizing the space in the papers. (speak with a public relations employee)
4. One week a month, send the newspaper an events calendar of things that are coming up in Manning.
5. Market Manning to these readers with the column because you control those messages.

Objective 3: Increase Manning's website readability by changing from administrative to human experience focused

Target Public: *Young Families aged 25-40, IKM Manning Alumni*

Project 1: Create a new layout for Manning's Website

1. Research the layout of other town's webpages to see what would be appealing for Manning's website
Examples: <https://www.cityofdubuque.org/>,
<http://www.cityofcarroll.com/>, <http://www.pella.org/>
2. Create a layout that would fit with Manning's mission and theme while also keeping the consumer in mind in order to tailor it towards them.
3. Hire a website designer or a University to implement it into a web design class for this website redesign.
4. Give the planned designs to the hiree and explain what you hope to achieve with this redesign.

4. Stay up to date with the designer to make sure your design is coming through. Give suggestions that you see fit.

Project 2: Video stories to feature on Manning's website

1. Create several small feature videos of the town.
2. First video is of a successful business owner in the town and how they have benefitted from starting a business and living in Manning
3. Second video is of a parent of a student and the student who goes to Manning High School and what it has to offer and what they like about it.
4. Third video is of a transplant to Manning talking about what made them move to Manning and why they chose the town.
5. Fourth video could be someone who works in the hospital talking about how it's impacted the town
6. Fifth video could be of Manning and all of the amenities they offer, this could be Ron talking during the video about all of the benefits of the town and what they're currently working on to improve the town.
7. Edit the videos to incorporate the speaker's name and what they do in Manning by displaying it as they talk.
8. Include b-roll footage of what the video is about as well as the person talking during the interview. For example: The fourth video which is about the hospital can include b-roll of a nurse in the hospital helping someone while the person in the interview is talking.

Project 3: Include access to Manning's open jobs and housing for easier access.

1. Create tabs on the website for Jobs and Housing.
2. The tabs should be visible and easy to find at the top of the screen
3. The housing tab should include a link to Zillow, links to local contractors (see Objective 2), and an explanation of building in Manning
 - a. Ex: signing up to be one of the 5 families who want to contract Classic Builders
4. The job tab should link to whatever website you decided to use in Objective 2.
5. Make sure the links work to these sites
6. The Job tab could also be found through the business page on the website.
7. Create collages for the headers of the tabs that include pictures of businesses and employees, and houses and the construction of houses.

Works Cited

[Manning Website](#)

Background Manning Community PDF ICON

Amenities Increasingly Draw people to the rural midwest by Gundars Rudzitis

Appendix

A Mission Statement: Manning has a statewide reputation for having a remarkable vision for the future, creating a framework through planning, and then utilizing a strong leadership team to accomplish the tasks regardless of obstacles.

B Main Street Manning Mission Statement: The mission of Main Street Manning (MSM) is to preserve and revitalize our historic downtown and to stimulate business, residential and recreational growth through the coordinated efforts of volunteers, private business, and local government for the benefit of present and future generations.

C Main Street Manning Vision Statement: Manning's vibrant Main Street with its clean and attractive storefronts will be a gathering place, inviting the community to shop, work and play. The welcoming downtown will be a mainstay for the city with convenient and easy access to a good variety of retail businesses, services, health care, and industry affording a comfortable way of life. A collaborative cooperative support system between businesses, the school, the city and all economic development partners will promote Manning's quality of life and attract new businesses and people - bringing jobs, increased business profitability and more opportunity for youth to stay.