



Pittsburgh Urban
Redevelopment Authority



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Buy Local *Best Practices Research*

by Randy Strothman, Becky Rodgers & Leslie Vincen

Included here are results of research in the 4th quarter of 2003 to discover Best Practices to guide development of a Pittsburgh “Buy Local” campaign.

The Research Process

The three investigators performed their research in the following manner:

- internet searches on key words “buy local” and “shop local”
- e-mailing several business groups in the nation
- following suggested leads on specific towns or cities
- reviewing 34 back issues of the “Downtown Idea Exchange:” 1998-2003
- reviewing 32 back issues of the “Downtown Promotion Reporter:” 1998-2003
- reviewing 6 back issues of the “Main Street News:” 2002-03
- scanning the book “Up Against the Wal-Marts”
- scanning the pamphlet “51 No-cost, Low-cost Ways to Promote Downtown”
- taking extensive notes and photocopying articles
- a spin off benefit is that the research also generated photocopies of more than 40 articles related to a wide variety of various Main Street issues

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A Summary

Some Conclusions, Observations & Patterns

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A first observation is that there is very little hard data to recommend particular strategies or tactics. Nevertheless, there are lots of creative and campaign ideas to promote districts. This report contains several examples of efforts to promote multiple districts within a single city, as well as efforts to promote clusters of small town districts within a region or county. The major, consistent findings of the research included here are:

PARTICIPATION

- Partnerships among diverse district stakeholders are important.
- It's important to engage the businesses to participate and encourage them to be creative.
- Corporate sponsorship is usually essential; clear tangible and intangible benefits to participation need to be demonstrated to decision makers.

CAMPAIGN & DISTRICT IDENTITY

- It's critical to create a clear strong identity and messaging for the campaign.
- Shopping in Main Street districts is an "urban experience," desirable to some, but not to others.
- It's critical to spotlight the unique characteristics, the Unique Selling Proposition of each unique district.

MARKETING BASICS

- It's advised to synchronize promotions with annual sales cycles, taping into the peak periods.
- The basics of good retailing cannot be ignored, incl. customer service, merchandising, etc.
- Year round, shopping should have an entertainment value, be a memorable event.
- Remember the classic four "P"s of marketing. Given that many Main Street businesses cannot compete on 1) Price and advertising expenditure with chains, they then must compete on uniqueness of 2) Product or Service, 3) Place (or where the transaction happens) and 4) clever, cost effective Promotion to niche markets.

PROMOTION & ADVERTISING

- Co-op advertising is recommended as a common, basic strategy, with one district raising \$140,000 for a year long TV campaign.
- The more media to promote, the better, including both advertising and stories.
- Special deals can be negotiated with the various media, especially combined with an ad buy; if possible get free PSAs or underutilized billboard, newspaper, radio or TV pricing.
- Newspaper inserts or other multi-page print pieces are often used to promote multiple districts or events; similarly, shopping guides or business directories are common.
- No-cost, local locations for distributing materials include banks, supermarkets & large employer paychecks.

DRAWS & HOOKS

- Special events and festivals are often used as a customer draw for a district.
- Use of Downtown Dollars, Frequent Buyer cards, etc. is a popular strategy.
- Contests and drawings are often used as a draw.
- Giveaways are often used as a draw, including free parking, gifts, buy-one-get-one & promotional items.

Notes from the research

Print: Concepts from Books & Pamphlets

Up Against the Wal-Marts: *How Your Business Can Prosper in the Shadow of the Retail Giants*
From Chapter 4 “53 Low Cost Promotion Strategies,” the following were selected as relevant if adapted to districts in a “Buy Local” campaign:

2. Create a good, ten second introduction to describe yourself and your business
4. Develop a clean, crisp, distinctive logo for your business
5. Use every advertising weapon at your disposal (including letterhead, cards, etc.)
8. Stage a fun event or happening at your store
12. Package a slow-moving item with a fast seller to move out the former
13. Develop a mailing list of your customers
22. Sponsor a drawing for free merchandise
26. Seek out informal partnerships with noncompeting businesses and arrange to work together in mutually beneficial ways
27. Use as much co-op advertising money as you can
29. Investigate remnant space advertisements (including in magazines)
30. Find a way to connect your products or services with a famous person or local personality
31. Offer free services to add value to the products you sell (eg. free delivery or wrapping)
33. Offer something for free (eg. piece of candy)
34. Start a frequent buyer program by copying the airlines frequent flyer programs
40. Set up truly unusual displays in your store windows
44. Draw people into your store with a fun contest
46. Send postcards
53. Write a letter to the editor or do a guest editorial

10 Tips for Terrific Retail Promotions *a Main Street News feature article, December 2002*

1. Be strategic in selecting promotional activities; capitalize on the unique local opportunities and strengths of the district
2. Coordinate activities to enhance peak retail seasons; identify prime times for shopping and develop targeted activities during these periods; it's easier to get customers to buy more at these periods
3. Recognize and reward current customers (see *Tactics* on p. 7)
4. Make shopping downtown entertaining & inviting (see *Tactics*)
5. Develop partnerships, including with other businesses, districts, tourism bureaus
6. Create inspired sidewalk sales to enhance their appeal, including theming them
7. Include kid friendly activity
8. Create opportunities to educate customers about goods & services available on Main Street (see *Tactics*)
9. Help businesses tie into major special events and the buying power of crowds
10. Rather than discounts, consider 'value-added' promotions; limit sales to 2 or 3 a year (see *Tactics*)

more

Up Against the Wal-Marts

In the chapter “Attracting Customers,” the following are suggestions that could be adapted to a larger promotional effort, like “Buy Local:”

- Build an image
- Attract attention with a unique message
- Be memorable
- Communicate the benefits to customers
- Be relevant to your business
- Be frequent, repeat, repeat
- Target the audience
- Be simple and straightforward
- Invite action



51 No-cost, Low-cost Ways to Promote Downtown

by the Downtown Research & Development Center

Of the 51 strategies offered, the following were selected as most relevant to a “Buy Local” campaign:

1. Window decorating
9. Cleanup downtown
22. Hundreds of Easter bunnies (retailers give out bunny ears to kids)
- 35/36. either a business- or corporate sponsored directory
37. Cooperative advertising
38. Coupon booklets
46. Corporate sponsors
50. Radio stations, including live remotes
51. Customer service week (train & emphasize this)
- Partner with a newspaper



Internet: Campaign Themes of other cities

(see more detail in next section)

Keep Austin Weird and Absolutely Austin (Austin, TX)

Shop Oakland (Oakland, CA)

Shop Local (Parker, CA; Galveston, TX)

Buy Local (Des Moines, Iowa)

Buy Local, Hire Local (Bradley Bourbonais, IL)

Thanks for Buying Local (Lethbridge)

Put Your Money Where Your House Is (Boulder, CO)

Come On, Be a S.L.O.B.—Support Locally Owned Businesses (Arizona Chain Reaction)

'City Life' a television and internet campaign— (West Palm Beach, FL)



Internet: Specific "Buy Local" Examples

- **Come On, Be a S.L.O.B.—Support Locally Owned Businesses** by *Arizona Chain Reaction*

This program is based on similar successful shop-local campaigns in Boulder and Austin. Promotion includes posters thanking customers for shopping local, a catchy slogan to let residents know which businesses are local, pooling resources to get advertising deals and sway politicians, putting out a directory of local businesses and hosting joint promotional events.

(<http://www.azcentral.com/specials/special37/articles/0403chainreact03.html>)

- **Keep Austin Weird** by *Absolutely Austin*

This started as a loose collaborative of business owners that value individualism. In an attempt to promote the unique characteristics of some businesses in Austin, the *Keep Austin Weird* logo was developed and then became a marketing slogan for *Absolutely Austin*. Stickers, t-shirts, hats and koozies promote the campaign. Says someone from the original group: "It was a small attempt to counter Austin's descent into rampant commercialism and over-development. Most people probably think of *Keep Austin Weird* as a marketing slogan, rather than our original attempt to highlight those aspects of our town that are really weird. Making money isn't high on that list."

(<http://www.keepaustinweird.com/home.html>)

- **2001 'Shop Oakland' campaign** by *Oakland DCED and Merchants Leadership Forum*

Encourages Bay Area residents to shop in Oakland by offering free parking—at a garage and at meters with stickers— a prize drawing and 100,000 colorful shopping bags in 3 sizes. Also patrons enter a prize drawing for two free tickets on Southwest Airlines, with registration forms in newspapers and participating shops. From downtown to Dimond, from Laurel to Lakeshore, Oakland has 40 commercial districts and shopping areas. Sponsors include transit operators, newspapers, Southwest Airlines and State Farm Insurance.

(http://www.oaklandchamber.com/html/2001_12_shop_oakland.html)

- **Parker 'Shop Local' campaign**

With the support of the Town of Parker, County of La Paz and local business enterprises, The Parker Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Committee have launched a "shop local" campaign throughout the Parker Area. The promotion is highlighted with a strong public service announcement schedule that includes

BUY LOCAL BEST PRACTICES

radio ads, Cable Network ads, billboards and banners throughout the community and a soon to be distributed Area Shopping Guide.
(http://www.parkertourism.com/news/2003_0410_shoplocal.html)

• **Put Your Money Where Your House Is** by *Boulder Area*

In Boulder, 143 stores have banded together to address the growing concern for the survival of independent, local businesses in the chain store economy. Tactics include a bimonthly newsletter and community education. Examples of education and advocacy include: shift as much of your spending as you can to locally owned independent businesses; Talk & Teach how shopping at independent businesses can benefit your community... so educate your friends or write letters to the editor; encourage local community groups to include support for local businesses in their mandate; advocate for public policy including tax rules that support local businesses.
(<http://www.pipcom.com/~ptbolets/business.html>)



• **‘Buy Locally’ campaign** by *Salt Spring Island*

An initiative of the CED Project to promote the benefits to the community of members choosing to shop locally—a strong, vibrant economy creates new jobs...buying products, services and expertise from local people nurtures the local economy.
(<http://saltspring.gulfislands.com/cedproject/buylocal.htm>)

• **‘Buy Local’ campaign** by *Des Moines, Iowa*

After an initial kickoff event with favorable media coverage, the business group wants to move the Buy Local campaign from seasonal to full-time through:
- assembling a business directory that also includes the economic benefits of buying local
- a bus trip for shoppers for a “focused shopping experience”
- “Buy Local Days” perhaps featuring an Uncle Sam with information about supporting independent businesses
- a focused publicity campaign

• **Galveston ‘Shop Local’ campaign** by *Galveston Chamber of Commerce*

While the campaign launched with a billboard campaign and two-sided window decals, soon a local newspaper approached the Chamber about doing a special insert around the campaign. The deal involved \$1,000 and a reduced ad rate for members in the 20-page insert.
(www.galvestonchamber.com)

• **‘Shop Local, Hire Local’ campaign** by *Bradley Bourbonnais Chamber, Illinois*

Launched with a countywide proclamation, resolutions supporting the idea from all units of government, and a large press conference. A billboard campaign is supported by local businesses. Local chambers work as partners, including representatives of each on the “Buy Local, Hire Local” committee. They hold seminars on ‘barriers’ to buying local with major purchasers and suppliers, seeking solutions. (emunday@bbchamber.com)

• **American Independent Business Alliance**

A coalition of local independent businesses, non-profit organizations and community supporters united to:
- raise community awareness of the benefits of doing business locally

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- collaborate toward gaining local independent businesses some of the advantages enjoyed by chains
- promote the interdependence of community-based businesses
- advocate to help shape local policy that nurtures the community.

The goal is to help communities thrive and to shift community culture toward supporting local entities and achieving sustainability and self-determination.

AMIBA - <http://amiba.net/> - offers a wealth of information and a planning packet for \$14 that includes: *(BR ordered this)*

- background articles on the benefits independent businesses provide their communities
- issue-specific articles and press clippings

Also, there are many sample materials from active IBAs, including local business directories, maps, cups, window decals, bumper stickers, plus:

- sample member recruitment brochures
- sample image and issue ads
- information on AMIBA workshops and presentations
- recommended Resources list
- information on policy strategies employed by other communities and policy resources.



Internet: Cited Benefits of Buying Local

The following benefit lists were derived from the research efforts. Several selling points here could be applied to the Pittsburgh campaign messaging, including with the press.

Benefits of Shopping Locally: list A

- Shopping locally creates community relationships with friends and neighbors
- By keeping businesses strong, you help to maintain and increase property values.
- The more revenue that is brought in locally, the more business owners are willing to share back with the community as donations to the various schools, churches and other organizations.
- Buying Local saves time by being convenient to home, thus enabling consumers to spend more time with the family.
- Local businesses have been known to offer home delivery, check cashing privileges and set up charge accounts to those who live in the community and are in special need.
- You receive warm, courteous service in local businesses.

Benefits of Shopping Locally: list B *by Community Future Development Corp.*

- Allowing businesses to donate dollars, products, and services to schools, amateur sports, etc.
- Creating a vibrant shopping and business district that attracts visitors and potential residents
- Saving residents time, effort and money by not having to leave the community
- Maintaining local employment for friends, family and neighbors
- Expanding the local, municipal tax base



Print Research: newsletters & reports

Sources cited here include:

MSN	Main Street News
DIE	Downtown Idea Exchange
DPR	Downtown Promotion Reporter
RD	Revitalizing Downtown: The Professional's Guide to the Main Street Approach, by National Trust for Historic Preservation
NN/LISC	Network News published by LISC Center for Commercial Revitalization

Tactics & Ideas

Spring Season Ideas

- A traditional Easter egg hunt, an egg decorating contest with prizes; plastic eggs filled with surprise gifts or discount coupons are given out in stores; also a children's breakfast with the Easter Bunny raises \$2,500 in funds for the district (DPR, 10/02)
- Other Easter-type events include a "bunny hop" dance, samples and events built around carrots, guess the jelly beans in a jar and choir participation in an event (DPR, 10/02)
- Additional Easter ideas include Easter bonnet contests and petting zoos filled with bunnies, chicks and other baby animals (DPR, 10/01)
- Earth Day launches district spring cleaning efforts and contests, tree planting and recycling; also an "All Species" parade down main street. (DPR, 10/02)
- More Earth Day activities include test drives and parades of alternative fuel vehicles, demonstrations of energy-efficient products, information displays, gardening workshops, recycling of hazardous materials, and tree planting and seedling distribution (DPR, 10/01)
- April 15/Tax Day festivities, especially for late filers, include back rubs for stress, free midnight snacks and the opportunity to hit an IRS official with a pie (DPR, 10/01)

early 2004 Dates of Note

Mar. 17	St. Patrick's Day
April 1	April Fools Day
April 4	Daylight Savings
"	Palm Sunday
April 6	Passover
April 9	Good Friday
April 11	Easter
April 18	Paul Revere's Ride
April 22	Earth Day
April 23	Shakespeare's B'day
April 25	Secretaries Day
May 5	Cinco de Mayo
May 6	Nat'l Day of Prayer
May 9	Mothers Day
May 31	Memorial Day
June 14	Flag Day
June 20	Father's Day

Frequent Customer Strategies

- Freedom Savings Card—discount card "wildly popular" in Tampa; 14,000 printed (DPR, 10/03)
- District-wide gift certificates through CertifiChecks sold at HSBC bank in Buffalo; \$30K sold, half redeemed (MSN, 3/03)
- District Frequent Shopper Card, redeemed after 5 purchases for a discount at a store; a full card with contact info enters them in a quarterly drawing for a \$100 gift certificate and puts their name into a data base of frequent shoppers (MSN, 12/02)
- A shopping Road Rally: visit a dozen stores, getting validation stickers on brochure and enter a contest for 40 \$25 gift certificates (MSN)
- Walla Walla, Wash., seeks one big sponsor for it's Christmas parade and participating businesses hand out "Downtown Dollars" during the parade, but they have to be spent the night of the parade. (MSN, 11/02)
- Customer Appreciation Day in Atlanta, IA, was successful with special discounts and incentives; promoted with a 6-page flyer including coupons and list of participating businesses; \$10 charge entitled businesses to a coupon; flyer distributed in local supermarket and in hospital paychecks; discounts of 25%+ worked best

- Wenatchee, Wash., offered a Downtown Employee Appreciation Shopping Night, with extended hours from 5-8pm; local employees with an ID get discounts or gift with purchase. (NSN, 8/03)
- Based on the premise that downtown workers are one of the best audiences, Marquette, MI, offers a year round discount card to all employees that work downtown; in addition to discounts on particular items, some free items are offered, like a free movie rental. (DPR, 9/02)

Co-op Advertising & Promotion Examples

- Winter Haven, FL, rewarded a sponsor's \$6,500 festival investment with \$55,319 in equivalent exposure—"Potential sponsors do not want warm and fuzzy explanations... they want to see that they will be getting bang for their buck"; a \$7,332 ad budget leveraged \$22,000 in radio, cable TV, newspaper and bus ad coverage (DPR, 10/02)
- Rockaway, NY, is creating downtown publications, rather than doing events in 2003, including a community resource guide with community history/profile and business directory; they expect a shelf life of 2 years
- Wenatchee, Wash., winner of the 2003 Great American Main Street Award, created a versatile image promotion jingle, in partnership with 20 businesses and 4 area radio stations, with 75 spots/month for a full year spread out over the 4 stations; businesses pay \$50/mo. over a full year (DPR, 8/03)
- West Palm Beach businesses pooled dollars to purchase 419 TV ads and website exposure; a local bank sponsored the \$140,000 twelve month campaign with \$50,000 and 14 businesses contributed \$80K.; the CityLife campaign has three levels: 1) 351 ads featuring specific businesses, 2) 68 generic ads about parking and festivals, and 3) branding for positive image; 36 TV ad package costs business \$293 (DPR, 2/03)
- Mexico, MO, "trained" consumers to shop downtown year-round, boosting annual sales by 7.5%, by creating a multi-week promotion called the Sunset Festival; the promotion included 7 consecutive Thursday 5:30-8:30 evening events; included a kids nite, music festival, art festival, international food festival, classic car show and a Moonlight madness sale; goal was to create a "marketing festival" to boost lagging retail sales; used "predetermined traffic patterns and proven techniques to draw customers into the stores." (DPR, 6/02)
- Dixon, Illinois, had customers register at Christmas for a 5' stocking of inexpensive goodies in every store, which each merchant purchased for \$50; for an extra \$20 the merchants could purchase 11x17 countdown signs to display in windows in the days leading up to the Christmas Walk; also a brochure listing businesses and special events (MSN, 6/03)
- Dayton Beach, FL, at Christmas promotes through events and a 12-page insert in the newspaper... and a partnership with a local radio station that gives away a package of gift certificates called "Eat Street Dinner Kit," during the 12 days leading to Christmas and which are good for specific months scattered throughout the year. (MSN, 8/03)
- Several articles offer the ideas of either a progressive dinner in district restaurants or a sampling of restaurants in one location (with auction & raffle) to attract shoppers (eg. DIE, 11/03)
- Make bulk purchase of an item to give away during promotions (eg. flowers for Mothers Day and give out with purchase; eg. give out chocolates with purchase or register for Death by Chocolate gift basket; NSN, 12/02, see 10 below)

Quality Promotions, plus Store & Service Appeal

- Several articles in the publications touted the importance of a stylish newsletter, magazine or e-newsletter for a district (eg. MSN, 12/02)
- Several articles offer advice about appealing store window displays & customer service (eg. NN/LISC, Fall '03)
- Crown Center, a 3-level retail center in Kansas City, MO, has organized dozens of events to get employees to hone in on customer service. (DPR, 9/02)



Print Research: newsletters & reports

Broader Strategies

Participation & Co-op Promotion

- Merchants are important participants in all downtown promotion activities; one way they can participate is by serving as ‘block captains,’ the communication link between the revitalization program and merchants.
- Downtown businesses can contribute directly to a promotional fund. To organize promotional activity, most local Main Street programs set up a promotion committee (RD)
- Individual businesses can tie in with broader downtown promotion campaign (ie. using “Buy Local” theme in their regular advertising) (RD)
- Complementary business clusters—businesses that sell related products and services, eg. bridal stuff—can work together to create seasonal promotions (MSN, see 8 below)
- Competitive or comparison clusters—businesses that sell similar products—can do the same
- Use coordinated joint advertising through ‘donut’ ads; sell individual ads to businesses (RD)
- Inexpensive outdoor media advertising can be negotiated, including billboards, bus tail panels and public radio & television (DPR, 4/03)
- Use an existing discount card (eg. Giant Eagle Advantage Card) to take advantage of unique discounts or sales at participating businesses; card shoppers could also register for a sweepstakes with a variety of prizes (MSN, 12/02)
- “In between events, your customers need constantly to know you’re there and that you have a lot to offer. The most effective way (we have found) to communicate this message is through cooperative advertising—a tastefully designed awareness advertisement that combines product and image.” (MSN, 12/02)

Long-range & Strategic Thinking

- Because downtowns face massive competition from suburban complexes, a CDC and marketing consultant offers three rules to compete, once a downtown has decided it wants to compete. (DPR)
 1. Develop the right message—pitch specific strengths to specific customer segments
 2. Focus on the customer—find out what they want, do surveys & ‘secret shopping’ to see their point of view
 3. Don’t just tell: sell—don’t be generic, describe specific products or services that motivate; get the word out
- Anticipate sales cycles and plan events to take advantage of established shopping habits; it’s easier to build on existing patterns than create new ones; retail activity usually follows cycles of garment industry (RD)
- Shopping must be **entertaining, fun & innovative**; potential objectives for promotions: (MSN, 12/02)
 - To increase sales, turn stock, or clear out merchandise for new arrivals
 - To reward present customers and strengthen relationships with them
 - To attract new and different customers
 - To distinguish your store(s) from the competition
 - To promote and establish your image
 - To sell your regular priced merchandise
- “Merchants need to provide an overall enjoyable shopping experience, so that consumers will want to return time and time again,” says retail consultant Barbara Wold, who offers 15 practical tips to

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owners to make shopping a pleasurable experience. (DPR, 1/02)

- Ingredients for event (and campaign?) success, by LISC program officer Darlene Rios-Drapkin (DPR. 8&9/03):
 - Good long range planning with clear goals
 - Design events that match capabilities
 - Be creative, think “outside the box” and make it unique
 - Manage volunteers carefully
 - Tailor sponsorship packages to your audience
 - Feed and entertain the press
 - Anticipate problems, including budget shortfalls, red tape, etc.
 - Do it right, do it with quality
 - Ask others to evaluate the event
 - Make it fun, for sponsors, vendors, volunteers or visitors
- Regarding the 2003 ‘soft’ economy: (DPR, 1/03)
 1. focus on community-building activities, like longer store hours & promotion of downtown shopping as a memorable experience
 2. tie patriotic themes to sponsorships; emphasize being an American & supporting our communities; seek sponsorships 18 months in advance; do not use tired old “Gold, Silver, Bronze” levels;
 3. promote downtown as an urban experience, as a lifestyle choice (including development efforts)
 4. create a clear identity—community “DNA” is made up of a community’s history, heritage, architecture and ethnicity; determine what differentiates downtown from other choices and promote it
 4. promote family activities, including volunteer opportunities



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