Developing Effective Business Recruitment Materials

By Amy Seeboth and Bill Ryan*

Once a market analysis has been completed, a community can use the information to develop business recruitment materials that showcase market potential. Recruitment materials can be a useful tool to attract business investment to their business district. Business investment could include new or expanded retail, services, restaurants, housing, offices and other uses. These materials can also serve business retention and expansion efforts.

Traditionally, business recruitment materials have been available in print packets. Increasingly, however, they are being developed as web-based programs and thus lend greater affordability and wider distribution. In this article we will explore some of the most common elements of successful business recruitment materials.

Content

In the spring of 2007, the University of Wisconsin-Extension examined 30 downtown business recruitment efforts across the Country.[i] The analysis showed that certain types of information are included in nearly every effort. The following types of market and economic data should be included in business recruitment materials. However, it is important not to overwhelm the reader with too much data. The objective should be concise information that provides the most useful data necessary to support sound business decision making.
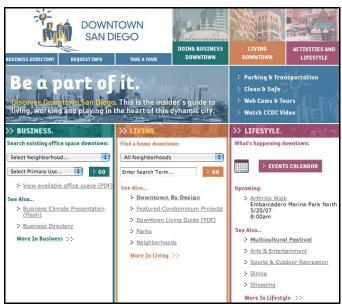
Demographics
Demographics are the cornerstone of any business recruitment effort and can vary from very basic to highly specialized. At minimum, this section should include general population make-up (age, gender, race, income, etc.) but should also include information such as spending potential. Citywide demographics are valuable and necessary, but data should also be broken down by neighborhood and/or zip code (preferably by neighborhood as that is often the information most relevant to a business district.

Demographics can be presented as maps, in tables and in graph form.

General Market Data (e.g. housing market, employment)
General market data information could be considered a subset of demographics, but is important enough to stand on its own. This section should include data on the housing market, employment rates, existing business mix, current investment rates and tourism information. It could also include circulation information such as traffic counts and pedestrian foot-traffic numbers.

Current and Planned Projects
When considering a community, developers and investors often review current development trends to evaluate future potential. A major key trend considers ongoing and planned development projects. Relevant information on this topic should include the project location, intended use, size (gross square feet) and if necessary a projected completion-date. This section could also include market absorption rates and estimates of current square feet per use. The most effective method to present this information is in map format.

Main page for San Diego's Downtown website. Divided by categories of information for relevant audiences: Business, Living, and Lifestyle.
Source: http://www.sandiegodowntown.org/

Commercial and Office Property Listings
Recruitment materials should also supply listings and information on the existing commercial and office spaces within the community. This section helps to highlight the existing business mix as well as profile the type and quality of existing structures. Details such as building/space size, cost per square foot (if relevant), intended or current use, and location should be listed. Although this section need not include current vacancy listings, it should provide contact information for each structure/space in case a prospective leaser/buyer is interested. This section is again best portrayed with maps.

Business Basics / Start-up Information
This section is extremely useful to both potential and existing businesses. The information should include information on zoning and land use regulations, an annual promotions calendar, contact information for relevant businesses/agencies (i.e. gas & electric hook-ups), tax rates, and any special features of the community. This section should also include information on available financial incentives, grants and loans. If possible, an anticipated development timeline, from proposal to final occupancy permit, should be included.

Presentation

The data and information must be organized and formatted in an easy-to-read and visually pleasing manner. Whether you choose to organize this information on the web or in a print format, the same basic standards should be keep in mind.

- If web-based, this marketing information should be presented in a consistent format (html and/or pdf). Presenting information in both formats allows more users access.
- Maps and photos should be used often, but only if relevant and linked to the simultaneous data.
- A consistent theme, design and layout for the packet should be developed and implemented.
- This is a marketing effort and accordingly, it should meet all the typical marketing standards: the end product should be attractive and catchy. If necessary, a professional marketing team should be contracted for the effort.
- And, finally, all information should be kept clear, concise and relevant. Any good business recruitment effort will include a high volume of information. The key is to keep the information well organized so the reader does not get lost, confused or loose interest while reading it.

Developers and investors should be able to find the information effortlessly, either on the web or with a single phone call. Contact information for acquiring a print packet should be clearly visible on existing websites or print materials. If the information is to be presented in the print format, several packets should be pre-made and ready for a quick mailing upon request.

A community may want to consider having both print and web-based recruitment materials available. Although web-based materials are quickly growing in popularity, many still rely upon and feel most comfortable with print materials. Remember you are providing a product to a potential customer - you want to make the process as easy as possible. This ease of access may make the difference in whether or not they consider your community.

Conclusion

Comprehensive and relevant market and economic data provides a foundation for successful business recruitment efforts. With this information compiled and properly presented with the user in mind, a community is on its way to attracting new development.

Example Downtown Business Recruitment Websites

Two quality websites that provide business recruitment information include:
Austin – provides a well-organized menu, powerful interactive mapping and useful links to information on starting a business
http://www.downtownaustin.com/
Seattle – Provides a thorough compilation of demographic data, makes good use of mapping, and nicely presents demographic information by neighborhood.
http://www.downtownseattle.com/

Sources

[1] Research conducted by the Center for Community & Economic Development as part of a market Analysis for Downtown Milwaukee

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