

Business Walk: Business Retention & Expansion Field Guide

January 19, 2016

What is a Business Walk?

A "Business Walk" is a day dedicated to learning more about your local businesses through face-to-face interviews on their turf. Local leaders visit each business with the hopes of gathering the knowledge they need to help their community and strengthen relationships. The "walk" can also be a celebration of local businesses -corresponding to an existing celebration or as a new event. UW-Extension then uses the responses to those interviews to generate a simple, easy-to-read report that decision makers can use to help strengthen their local businesses.

Why Walk?

To understand the issues facing your business community.
To build working relationships between decision makers and local businesses.
To celebrate and promote your local businesses.
To provide local businesses with educational resources.

The Walking Guide

The following text will outline the 8 steps needed to conduct your own "walk". Because every community is different, the "Walking Guide" is meant as a road map, not a formula. The "Steps" of the guide are as follows:

- Step 1: Who's In Charge?
- Step 2: Who's With Me!
- Step 3: Save the Date
- Step 4: Plan the Walk
- Step 5: Talk the Talk
- Step 6: Walk the Walk
- Step 7: Find Your Story
- Step 8: Tell Your Story





Step 1: Who's in Charge?

Who from your community will serve as the "point person" for the "walk"? Is it a chamber director, mayor, village president, council member, board member, or business person? It doesn't make much difference, but it should be someone that represents the community at-large and has the means to rally troops and deploy resources.

Step 2: Who's With Me!

The "Business Walk" is a simple program, but it does require some planning. It's important that the person in charge of orchestrating the program have support. This is largely a communications and event planning exercise, so choose your team accordingly. Some folks are "thinkers" and some folks are "doers". You'll need both.

Step 3: Save the Date

Community calendars are already full of activities throughout the year. It is important to choose a date that can either stand alone or "piggy-back" onto an existing celebration. Once you arrive on a date, get the word out to the community, especially to the businesses you hope to meet with.

Step 4: Plan the Walk

Sit down with your team and determine what resources you'll need to make your "walk" a success. Here are some things to consider:

- **Walkers:** How many people will you need to effectively meet and speak with each of your businesses in a day? Typically, teams of (2) people are given a certain number of businesses to meet with, within a designated time-frame. One person is identified as the "primary walker" the other as the secondary walker. The "primary walker" is responsible for initiating conversation, shaking hands and asking the first (3) questions. The "secondary walker" is responsible for filling out the provided survey form and asking the (7) follow-up questions.
- **Schedule:** There are several things to consider for the day. What works well for your business owners? What works well for the media? And, what works well for your team? Make sure that the emphasis remains on the business owners. The "walk" is meaningless without their participation. Ask each business owner what works best for them. If needed, divide up the area into morning and afternoon walks and use the lunch hour to meet and compare notes.
- **Press:** Make sure the local newspaper and radio are aware of your event. If possible, have someone follow a team to take pictures and document the day.
- **Gifts:** Show your appreciation to your local businesses. If you have the resources, leave them a gift, a card, or at least some literature on how you plan to use the information that they have provided. Some communities bring gift bags that include gift cards and educational materials for local businesses.





Step 5: Talk the Walk

In order for your “walk” to be a success, you’ll need to spend time marketing it. The purpose of your marketing efforts is three-fold:

1. To generate positive “buzz” to encourage participation.
2. To promote local businesses’ role in defining the community.
3. To promote local leadership’s role in strengthening local businesses.

Some methods you may want to consider:

- Traditional Media: Newspaper, radio, postcards, utility bills, and newsletters.
- Electronic Media: Facebook, websites, Twitter, and electronic newsletters.
- Guerrilla Marketing: Non-conventional approaches to “getting the word out”. (One example might be to host a student coloring or photo contest to generate materials for posters, stickers, fliers, playing cards, etc.)

Note: It’s best to let your local business owners know what to expect ahead of time. Please feel free to share with them the purpose of the “walk”, how you intend to use the results of the “walk”, and the list of (10) questions.

Step 6: Walk the Walk

Spend the day meeting with your local business owners in their stores, shops, and restaurants. The “walk” works best if you travel in two’s. The “primary walker” shakes hands and initiates discussion, while the “secondary walker” takes notes using the provided survey form.

Once the team walks into a business, the “primary walker” shakes hands, maybe gets a photo taken, and asks (3) quick questions:

1. “How’s business?”
2. “What do you like about doing business here?”
3. “What can we do to help you succeed?”

Next, the “secondary walker” asks (7) follow-up questions:

4. “How long have you been in business here?”
5. “What type of business is this?”
6. “Where is most of your competition?”
7. “Where do you purchase most of your supplies & support services?”
8. “How much does your business rely on the internet?”
9. “How many full-time and part-time employees to you have and how will that change over the course of the year?”
10. “How do you recruit new workers?”





Step 7: Find Your Story

Once you have finished your 'walk', submit the provided survey forms to UW-Extension. The local UW-Extension agent will work with the UW-Extension Land Use & Community Development Specialist to generate a brief report that you can bring back to your community free of charge. The report will contain the following items:

- Purpose of the "Business Walk"
- Description of the Methodology
- Summary of the (3) "Primary Questions"
- Summary of the (7) "Secondary Questions"
- Summary of "Common Themes"
- Acknowledgments and list of resources for "Next Steps"

Step 8: Share Your Story

It is important to share your report with your stakeholders. This may include local business owners, elected officials, chambers of commerce, and the general public. This is only the report. The next step is to take action based on the outcomes of your "walk".

Acknowledgments

This program is based off of other successful Business Walks from communities in other parts of the United States and Canada. The (3) primary questions are based from other Business Walks programs while the (7) secondary questions are based on the University of Minnesota's Business Retention & Expansion survey instrument. Both programs were recommended to this agent at the 2012 IEDC Business Retention & Expansion Training Event in Vancouver, B.C. In addition, local business leaders and Chambers of Commerce participated in developing the final version of the survey instrument found in this document.

References

- Carrigan, Ryan, interview by Beverly Broihahn. 2013. Director of the San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Chavez, Alex, interview by Beverly Broihahn. 2013. Special Projects Coordinator for the Marana Chamber of Commerce
- Gerig, Wendy, interview by Beverly Broihahn. 2013. CEO of Roseville Chamber of Commerce
- International Economic Development Council. 2012. "Business Retention and Expansion." Economic Development Training Class. Vancouver, British Columbia: IDEC, November 1-2.
- Johnson, Todd. 2013. 2013 Fennimore Business Walk. Lancaster: University of Wisconsin Extension-Grant County.
- Johnson, Todd. 2014. 2014 Lancaster Business Walk. Lancaster: University of Wisconsin Extension-Grant County.
- Johnson, T. 2013. "Business Walk Survey Form." Form. University of Wisconsin Extension-Grant County.
- Marasa, Jill, interview by Beverly Broihahn. 2013. Business Development & Finance Manager for Martin County
- Pollard, Cynthia, interview by Beverly Broihahn. 2013. Director for Greater Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce



Contact:

For more information regarding "Business Walk", please contact:

Todd W. Johnson
Land Use + Community Development Specialist

University of Wisconsin-River Falls (Extension)
315 Agriculture Science
410 S. 3rd Street
River Falls, WI 54022

todd.johnson@uwrf.edu
(715) 425-3941 office
(715) 821-9217 mobile

