

WEDA 2014 WINTER CONFERENCE PRESENTATION
Strategic Communications for Local Economic Development Organizations
Information Sheet

INTRODUCTION

Selling a community/region to business owners or developers is extremely important. The economic benefits are substantial, and the ripple effect is tremendous. This makes it essential for economic development organizations to sell their area the “right way.” From my perspective, this means selling from the heart and getting people to make an emotional connection with the vision.

People are compelled to invest in purchases every day based on emotionally compelling ads from companies like Apple or T-Mobile. So, how do they do it? They spend the time and energy understanding what makes their customers tick. They understand how to tap into addressing customers’ pain points. And, they produce powerful – yet simple – messages with dynamic imagery that push people into action. Because a company speaks to “us” and our lifestyle, we align with the brand.

This is exactly what local jurisdictions need to do to fulfill an economic development vision – get to the heart of their targets. So, how does a local economic development organization leader take the right steps? The answer is strategic communications.

WHAT IS STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS?

- ✓ Strategic communications is all about deliberate communication focused on specific outcomes.
- ✓ Strategic communications is not about dumping information on people; it’s about ensuring people hear the information and take action.
- ✓ If selling a community/city/region, strategic communications entails:
 - pinpointing a tight vision or goal
 - defining how to measure success
 - creating a tight list of target audiences
 - conducting research about the target audiences’ motivations
 - getting very clear on the **Unique Competitive Advantage**
 - building very specific messaging
 - delivering messaging through paid, owned, earned and managed media
 - building relationships
- ✓ Success is easier with an “authentic story” that hits an emotional chord.
- ✓ Strategic communications entails thinking like a leader and taking risks.

WHY BOTHER?

- ✓ Competition for recruiting and retaining businesses is fierce (think Boeing).
- ✓ Digital communication has transformed the business marketplace.
- ✓ Because of the noise in the marketplace and digital communication, relationships are now more important than ever with brands – something has to cut through the clutter.



- ✓ Need to stand out and make sure that important audiences understand.
- ✓ Need to proactively retain and recruit businesses, and attract a highly skilled workforce.
- ✓ Many cities or communities lack an economic development communications strategy, which provides an opportunity!

TAKE ACTION

There are key steps in a successful strategic communications program for economic development.

- Clarify the goal(s).
- Create success metrics:
 - # of businesses recruited (or prospects/leads)
 - # of businesses retained
 - # of recruitment meetings
 - Cluster developed
 - Community engaged
 - Developers secured
 - Workforce growth
 - Innovation investment
- Define only a few target audience(s).
- Get clear on marketplace and competitive landscape.
- Understand competitive advantage.
- Create messaging.
- Implement digitally, visually and through paid, owned, earned and managed content.
- Distribute information and build relationships.

REAL WORLD EXAMPLES

Frause has worked with local jurisdictions to create strategic communications programs. Each of these programs included the steps defined above, along with our signature way of creating collaboration amongst stakeholders. Our client list includes:

- City of Kenmore
- City of Lakewood
- Downtown Seattle Association
- Economic Development Council for King and Snohomish Counties
- Maple Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Seattle Metro Chamber of Commerce
- Washington Filmworks

Other real world examples are the [Excellence in Economic Development Awards](#) winners through the International Economic Development Council.



INNOVATION MATTERS

Economic development professionals can improve strategic communications results by embracing these trends: big picture branding, content marketing, social research, responsive web design, video, and community profile brochures. Here are a few examples:

- [Tampa Bay – “Think Big. We Do.” – Community Profile](#)
- www.lacity.org
- www.waterloo.ca
- www.oregon4biz.com
- [City of Stillwater, Oklahoma - “Planting the Seeds of Success” Consumer Business Report](#)
- [Lubbock Economic Development Alliance – Site Selector Brochure](#)
- [Quebec – “Invest in the Quebec City Region” – Community Profile](#)

For more information contact:

Erika Schmidt, APR
Vice President/COO, [Frause](#)
206-618-7110
eschmidt@frause.com