



Virginia Main Street

MONITOR

TECHNICAL BRIEF

Summer 2006

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The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's Main Street Program provides downtown revitalization technical assistance to Virginia communities, using the National Main Street Center's Four Point Approach™ (Organization, Promotion, Design & Economic Restructuring) to comprehensive preservation-based revitalization of historic commercial districts.



Department of Housing and
Community Development

Creating a Brand for Downtown

By Tripp Muldrow



We see them everyday on the products we consume, the familiar red and white script on a Coca-Cola can, the swoosh on a pair of Nike sneakers, and those ubiquitous golden arches on the by-pass. They are brands that help us associate a product or service with an image. Some are as simple as colors: "What does Brown do for you?" - UPS, others are tag lines. Remember, "Sometimes you feel like a nut, sometimes you don't..." - Mounds and Almond Joy.

As Main Street organizations work hard to recruit and retain customers downtown, more and more communities are turning to branding to help put the polish on downtown's image. They too realize that "If you build it, they will come," is not always true, and many times a strategic and well-connected marketing and branding effort can be just as effective as brick and mortar projects are in bringing people back downtown.

However, creating a brand for downtown is not as simple as you think. It is easy to fall into the trap of sending mixed signals to our customers. Conveying a consistent image and message is important. To do so, you have to ask yourself some important questions.

Does the design of your Main Street Web site look like the shopping and dining guide for your town? Does the shopping and dining guide use the same lettering as the "Welcome to Downtown" signs? What about special events? Does the promotional material for them cleverly play on that same image of downtown - ingraining downtown's brand into the psyche of the consumer? Have you updated that tired design from 1985 to market your downtown's true image for 2006?

If you answered no to any of these questions, then you might consider

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evaluating your downtown brand. Remember, those chain stores on the edge of town spend big bucks to make sure their image is polished and up-to-date.

Let's explore examples from two Virginia communities that have worked on their downtown brand. Leesburg, a DHCD Commercial District Affiliate, has a vibrant downtown in fast growing Northern Virginia, yet a zip code survey of customers visiting downtown shops indicated that a relatively small portion of their customers were coming from the local area, particularly the mammoth Washington, DC market. In order to capitalize on this missed opportunity, downtown merchants are teaming up with the town to launch a joint marketing effort using the brand, "Meet ME downtown.

The ads will profile local shopkeepers and the individual attention that they give to customers, allowing individual business owners to catch a piece of the brand equity. The ads seek to contrast downtown Leesburg's small town charm against a rapidly growing and congested Northern Virginia market. Also planned is a series of ads for the holiday season that will invite shoppers to get reacquainted with all that downtown Leesburg has to offer.

Last year, Luray Downtown Initiative, with the assistance from the Virginia Main Street program, went through a two-day branding charrette put on by Arnett-Muldraw and Associates to develop a community brand.

Like many communities, Luray was sending mixed messages to consumers with a variety of images and brochures. As the home of Luray Caverns, the gateway to Shenandoah National Park, in addition to a great downtown, Luray had a number of images it was projecting. The new logo and tag line took the image of the Hawksbill Creek and the Shenandoah mountains and nestled them together with the tagline: "The Town Where Caverns Meet the Sky." The brand is now being used on marketing material for downtown and the community as a whole.

Both of these communities went through a branding charrette process to establish their image. Like a design charrette, the branding charrette quickly delves into the

issues that a community faces and prepares a series of branding recommendations and images to share with the stakeholders. The images are refined and then used as a springboard for implementation.



Branding can be an effective tool to refine your message and clearly connect downtown to the consumers.

Tripp Muldraw, AICP is president of Arnett Muldraw & Associates, Ltd. a community planning firm based in Greenville, South Carolina that specializes in downtown branding for Main Street Communities across the United States. Arnett Muldraw assisted the Virginia Main Street Communities of Luray, South Boston, Harrisonburg, Rocky Mount, as well as, other Virginia communities on their community branding efforts.

What is a brand?

A brand is an image with which people can associate a product, service or place. It is an identity.

It is the ability to capture positive interactions and reapply them to the worth of your name. Your brand can develop equity, which can have a real impact on your bottom line. For example, why do millions of Americans walk into the drugstore and pay four or five dollars more for Tylenol than the drug store brand with the exact same ingredients? Part of the answer is that Tylenol has spent decades and millions to grow their brand equity.

Back to those of us that don't have millions to spend on advertising. How do you develop a brand? How do you promote your brand? How do you evaluate your brand? And finally, how do you use your brand to your advantage?

How do you develop a brand?

The process is simple. Ask, ask, ask, and then ask some more questions. Everyone in your town knows what the brand is. It is why they live there. It is what they do on the weekend. It is where they take people who visit. It is how they relax, what they miss when they are away, and why they want to raise their kids there.

Put all that together and you have your brand. Throw in some snappy graphics that make you unique, attach a tagline that shows your wit, and you are off to a good start!

How do you promote your brand?



Once you have created an image, use it. Use it consistently, and most importantly, use it everywhere: street signs, banners, house flags, bumper stickers, Afghans, benches, trash cans, gateway signs, way finding signs, vehicles, and anything else you can think of.

You can begin creating a strong identity for your community simply by getting your brand on everything. So, make that image available and easy to share. Get everyone to use it: local government, the media, the school system, local businesses, etc. The more your brand is seen, the more valuable it becomes. Consider running co-operative advertising with local businesses that include you logo. Appear united!

How do you evaluate your brand?

Every year or so, step back, look, and see if people are still relating. Change that is market-driven is good, change for change's sake is not good. People will become attached locally, but make sure the identity is still connecting with both local and regional audiences.

How do you use your brand to your advantage?

This is a simple: develop a brand, promote the brand, and people will catch on. People move closer, shop closer, work closer. Tax base increases, and everything is better off. Bigger tax base equals more room and resources to grow your brand!

Anatomy of a Branding Charrette

By Amy Yarcich

After reading about the benefits of creating a brand and the success of branding charrettes in Virginia Main Street communities, you may be wondering about the experience and whether you should undertake planning one for your community. As with most successful downtown projects – planning and preparation are the keys to success.

The first step will likely be selecting a consultant to conduct the branding charrette and developing a contract that clearly outlines services to be provided (e.g. specific products), timeframes and costs. You'll want to get proposals from several consultants to identify someone who can provide a top-quality product at a reasonable price.

When working with any consultant, the most valuable research into their performance involves checking references – contacting past clients to ask detailed questions about their experience and evaluating any work samples they might be able to share.

Branding charrettes take time to coordinate, and work best when you can assemble a variety of different stakeholder groups to meet with your consultant over a period of at least two days. Once your consultant is selected, make sure to give yourself sufficient lead time to promote and coordinate the charrette in your community, ideally about four to six weeks.

Use your local media, organization newsletter, e-mails and phone calls to get the word out to people involved with your organization and the community at large. In terms of the agenda, there are numerous options, but here is an example to consider:

Day One

10 a.m. – Meet with local representatives for walking / driving tour of downtown and community

11 a.m. – Meet with Economic Restructuring Committee

Noon – Kick-off luncheon to explain process to Charrette Coordinating Committee (and possibly public)

2 p.m. – Meet with real estate/property owners group

3 p.m. – Promotion Committee/local retailers

4 p.m. – Youth representatives

5 p.m. – Consultant Team dinner (and work session late into the night)

Day Two

8 a.m. – Design Committee / Beautification Group

9 a.m. – Main Street Business and Professional Group

10 a.m. – Target market – (ex. women 40 – 65, tourists, etc.)

11 a.m. – Briefing and sharing of preliminary work with Charrette Coordinating Committee

Noon – Lunch and Consultant Team work session

5 p.m. – Large public meeting with all involved to unveil results

Eddie Bumbaugh, executive director of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR) who recently underwent a branding charrette, said the most critical item for success was “deciding on the categories of people who should participate in the focus group meetings, identifying the individuals to invite, and then extending the invitations.”



Participants from Harrisonburg, Luray and South Boston all mentioned that it was also essential to send sample materials from their community to the consultants in advance – current logos, taglines, signage, brochures, newsletters, ads (those produced by the Main Street organization, but also ones used by other groups).

Each community was also asked to work with their local businesses to conduct a

simple zip code in advance of the charrette. This entailed a few, strategically selected downtown merchants writing down each of their customer’s zip codes for one week. This provided valuable information on downtown’s current customer base, which helped in developing appropriate target markets for advertising and publication distribution.

According to Jerry Van Eimeren, executive director for Destination Downtown South Boston (DDSB), communities undertaking a branding charrette will be “very pleasantly surprised at the creative results in such a short period of time.” All the communities received ready-for-print, electronic versions of logos, taglines, ads and other products developed during the charrette.

Luray has been particularly enthusiastic in using the products from the charrette after they were unveiled to a large community audience at the culmination of the two-day event. “We have ‘stamped’ everything with the logos,” said Catherine Stewart, executive director for the Luray Downtown Initiative (LDI).

LDI has used the ads and many of the logos provided for the organization including different, yet coordinated, logos for special events like the Fourth of July and Festival of Spring. South Boston has used several of the creative ads developed, particularly the racing related ads that connect the community’s racing heritage with the historically significant

Crossing of the Dan. South Boston has also used the new, vertical organization logo developed in some new banners and metal benches for downtown.

All three communities said that one of the benefits of the charrette was that it forced them to really step back and look at their image and the message they were sending through a variety of mediums. Prior to the charrette messages were eclectic and uncoordinated. Since the charrette, Harrisonburg has worked to be more consistent with their branding appearance and use of slogans, and South Boston has tightened up control on the usage of color in their logo to maintain better consistency.

Because a branding charrette is a process of gathering input from multiple stakeholders and synthesizing the information into cohesive products, it’s inevitable that not everyone will love everything developed.

However, participating in the process itself is valuable because it allows stakeholders an opportunity to share their opinions on downtown, the organization and the community. The charrette process can be particularly productive if the organization has not yet developed a distinct brand identity, but it can also be valuable for a more seasoned organization in order to evaluate and reinvigorate their existing brand. In the end the benefit and value of the charrette depends largely on the community’s interest and willingness to use the products developed.



Signage for Fun, Influence, and More Business

One of the biggest issues I deal with in working with the independent retailer, and one that has the biggest influence on a store's sales, is the issue of signage. Signage is a form of service. Signage is brand building. It's image creation and it can create an emotional attachment to a business.

The most important advertising a plumber, landscaper, or any tradesman can have is the lettering and signage on the trucks. The most important thing a retailer can do is to create exterior signs that invite customers in their store. Interior signage can even turn a store around almost instantly. It has a great impact on the independent retailer who traditionally undersigns their stores. Maybe it's because they don't have the sign making abilities that a larger store might have, or they just lack understanding of how powerful signage can be. But whatever the reason, small stores can experience big sales increases with the right signs.

On the other hand, the larger retailer has, in many cases, gone overboard with signage. Manufacturers love to give the large stores signs about their products that smaller businesses aren't offered. The bottom line is large stores have too many and small stores don't have enough signs.



There are three basic categories of signage, and many times they can be combined:

Informative signage

- in where departments are, rest rooms, items, etc

Selling signage

- these contain a sell word or phrase, such as "New Arrival," "Reduced to Sell," "Soft-Feeling Sheets." This category also includes any price propositions such as 20% Off, 2 for 1, Second One Half Price, etc.

Entertainment signage

- ranges from a cute expression such as, "Oops we goofed," to a picture of the product in use. Pictures are good, but this is where humor and fun rule.



By Rick Segel

If you are still not sure what to sign, then I suggest you just listen to the people who answer the customer's questions. They will tell you what signs to use. Whatever you do, have some fun with them. Fun signs get fun responses and make for fun places to shop. Boring signs are boring.

Called by retail industry journalists "the leading retail speaker in the country," Rick Segel has more than 25 years experience in retailing and consulting. More can be found at: www.ricksegel.com.

Let's not forget our challenge will be how to keep customers coming back to our stores after they have shopped online. Signage is one of those tools that can help to bring back the fun in shopping in a "brick and mortar" store.

Sign Rules:

1. Tell them where it is: Obvious but customers appreciate it.

2. Tell them what's new: New is a sell-word because people want to know what's new and different. "New Arrivals" works, but is overused.

3. Remind people what else they need: Customers appreciate this sell-sign because it might save them a trip back to the store. An example is a sign in a paint department reminding people that they need brushes and a drop cloth.

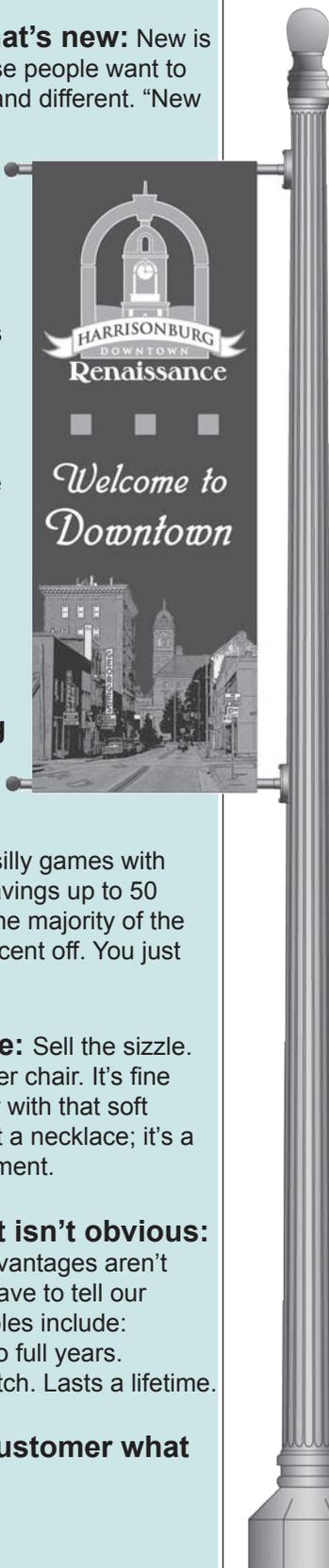
4. Make pricing easy to understand: Customers don't have time to play silly games with a sign that says savings up to 50 percent off when the majority of the rack is only 20 percent off. You just turn people off.

5. Add romance: Sell the sizzle. It's not just a leather chair. It's fine Corinthian Leather with that soft supple feel. It's not a necklace; it's a Show Piece Statement.

6. Explain what isn't obvious: Sometimes the advantages aren't obvious, and we have to tell our customers. Examples include: Guaranteed for two full years. Impossible to scratch. Lasts a lifetime.

7. Inform the customer what they will save:

- Money
- Time



Virginia Main Street 2007 Application Workshops Scheduled

Virginia Main Street (VMS) will accept community applications to become designated a VMS community in April, 2007. Because the application is relatively lengthy, and the application process competitive, communities interested in applying should attend one of the two upcoming application workshops.

VMS will host the first workshop Tuesday, Jan. 16, 2007 at the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development offices in Richmond. The second will be held Thursday, Jan. 18, 2007 in Marion. The registration deadline for both workshops is Jan. 5, 2007. VMS will make the application and guidelines for completing it made available on Dec. 15. Communities eager to prepare for the 2007 application round can contact VMS at (804) 371-7030 or mainstreet@dhcd.virginia.gov.

Bringing Energy Efficiency to Main Street Businesses

The Shenandoah Bicycle Company (SBC), located in downtown Harrisonburg, was the subject of a project aimed at improving energy efficiency in Main Street businesses. Coordinating the project were the Virginia Sustainable Building Network, Eddie Bumbaugh of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance,

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and the student chapter of the Association of Energy Engineers (AEE) at James Madison University (JMU).

The group completed a comprehensive audit of SBC's energy use, including suggested energy conservation measures. The audit carefully itemized all sources of energy use, from the heating system to light bulbs, calculated each item's total energy consumption, and came up with a detailed cost analysis of SBC's total energy usage.

It explored alternative, energy efficient fixtures and systems to replace those currently in use, and gave cost estimates of each. The report concluded with recommendations and projected payback periods for the energy saving improvements. SBC is planning to implement some of the recommendations immediately and is giving the others serious consideration.

The goals of the project, apart from providing an excellent learning experience for AEE members, are to raise awareness of the benefits of energy efficiency and their potential application for downtown buildings. The project was a success and AEE plans to do it again this year. In addition to working with another business in downtown Harrisonburg they will be taking on a residential unit as well.

To learn more energy efficient buildings in Virginia, visit the Virginia Sustainable Building Network online at: www.vsbn.org. Kathy Frazier Appointed to Virginia's Art and Architectural Review Board

Kathy Frazier of Frazier Associations in Staunton, who has served as the

Virginia Main Street Architect since the program's inception, was recently appointed by Governor Tim Kaine to serve on the State of Virginia's Art and Architectural Review Board.

The Art and Architectural Review Board is an advisory board in the executive branch of state government. It reviews all state funded projects for architectural and artistic quality. The members are appointed for terms of four years each. Our congratulations go out Kathy for this honor; we know she will serve the Commonwealth well in this position.

Outdoor Dining Guidelines

Few things add to the vitality of downtown like outdoor dining. Unfortunately, when most of our downtown commercial districts were built incorporating space for outdoor dining wasn't a consideration.

In order to effectively incorporate outdoor dining into your downtown, careful consideration must be given to the relevant design controls and

This January, the City of Alexandria adopted the King Street Outdoor Dining Design Guidelines. These guidelines apply to King Street and other adjoining streets in the Old Town Alexandria section of town, the city's historic commercial core.

These thorough and well-illustrated guideline are a valuable resource for any community considering allowing, promoting, or expanding outdoor dining in their downtown.

They can be viewed and downloaded online at: www.ci.alexandria.va.us/planningandzoning/pdf/outdoor_dining_design_guidelines.pdf.

People

Staunton Downtown Development Association has hired Julie Markowitz as their new executive director. Markowitz brings more than ten years experience in sales, marketing, and event planning to the job. Prior to coming to Staunton, Markowitz worked for the Simon Property Group in Charlottesville and served as marketing manager for the Valley

Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond's Community Affairs Office. We thank Courtney for her many contributions to VMS, including creating the database for monthly report information, creation of the VMS program directory, and her work on the 2005 Maintaining Community Character in the Face of Growth Summit and whitepaper. We wish her all the best in her new position. Courtney's position with VMS is expected to be filled by November.

In September, Dave Lewis joined Virginia Main Street team as our new intern. Dave is in his last year of the Masters of Urban and Regional Planning at Virginia Commonwealth University. A native of North Carolina, Dave worked on Capital Hill in Washington, DC and interned at the Virginia Economic Development Partnership before coming to work at VMS.



zoning ordinances. Creating a standard that is flexible enough to encourage a restaurant to invest in an outdoor dining area, yet stringent enough to maintain a look that is consistent with the image of downtown can be extremely difficult. Fortunately, an excellent example of outdoor dining guidelines already exists.

Mall in Harrisonburg. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in music from Bridgewater college in 1982. Originally from Luray, Markowitz has lived in Staunton since 1993.

The Virginia Main Street program congratulates Courtney Anderson Mailey on her new position at the

Virginia Main Street Monitor
is published by the
Virginia Main Street program
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Virginia Department of Housing
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HOUSING AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT CALENDAR

October

26-27 Virginia Downtown Development Association 22nd Annual Conference: Suffolk (Jodi Gillette, jkgillette@aol.com, (434) 238-0986)

November

9 Virginia Main Street Manager's Retreat: Sweet Briar
13-16 National Main Street Basic Training: Washington, DC (NTMSCTraining@nthp.org or (202) 588-6219)
14-16 Section 106: An Introduction: Washington, DC (National Preservation Institute, info@npi.org, (703) 765-0100)
16 Path to Small Business Success Series: Legal Do's and Don'ts: Harrisonburg (Department of Business Assistance, sbdc@jmu.edu, (540) 568-3227)

December

1 Preserve America Community application deadline (www.PreserveAmerica.gov)
6 Virginia Tourism Corporation Orientation Session: Richmond (VTC, pbozorth@virginia.org, (804) 545-5580)

January

16 Virginia Main Street 2007 Application Workshop: Richmond (mainstreet@dhcd.virginia.gov, (804) 371-7030)
18 Virginia Main Street 2007 Application Workshop: Marion (mainstreet@dhcd.virginia.gov, or (804) 371-7030)
24-26 North Carolina Main Street Annual Conference: Morganton, NC (mainstreet@nccommerce.com, (919) 733-2850)