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“Meet You in Manning”

Fall 2018



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Executive Summary

Manning, Iowa, is aiming to sustain as well as grow their population over the course of the next year. This communication plan provides necessary background research, the product of Manning, the town's environment, and the target publics that we hope to reach. Based off of our findings, this plan has designed four key objectives to educate and increase awareness among target publics about what makes Manning stand out among other rural towns. These objectives are targeted at millennial couples looking to start a family or who already have children under the age of 10, future and current alumni from IKM high school, and tourists coming to Manning for the attractions.

Introduction

This plan aims to increase the population in Manning, Iowa by means of increased communication efforts through focus groups, social media, Manning's website, and social events. Below, we focus on what aspects make Manning stand out from other rural towns.

Background

Manning, Iowa, is a farm town located in Carroll County about 90 miles east of Des Moines. The surrounding counties include Audubon, Crawford, and Shelby. Manning is approximately 80 miles from the Des Moines metro area, 85 miles from the Omaha/Council Bluffs metro area, and under 100 miles from Sioux City (Manning proposal p. 3).

Manning is the second largest community in Carroll County with 1,558 residents, according to the 2015 American Community Survey. Their population between the years 2010 to 2015 grew from 1,500 to 1,558, which is contrary to statewide rural trends.

Historically known as a railroad boom town, Manning is a German-heritage community. One of Manning's main attractions is a German Hausbarn that was brought over from Germany in 1996. The Hausbarn was originally built in 1660 and conveys Manning's commitment to preserve their heritage (GermanHausbarn.com).



Although Manningtonites have a strong German heritage (98.1%), they are open to diversifying the community's ethnic background (Ron Reischl). While not currently ethnically or racially diverse, Manning has gender diversity amongst their leadership positions (for example, within their Chamber of Commerce and City Council there is strong representation from both women and men (manningia.com). The median age of residents in this town is 48.3 (citydata.com). This farm town is education centered, with 98.1% of residents holding a high school diploma or higher.

Manning owns its water, sewer, electric, gas, television, internet, phone, and utilities. This offers the community lower rates than private utilities. Because of the locally owned Manning municipal utilities (MMU), residents are less vulnerable to power outages and are given the best rates possible (manningia.com). Although the utilities are locally owned, the internet services do not have fiber optic cables, which prevents Manning from having high-speed internet.

According to the Manning website, approximately 550 students from preschool through high school attend the IKM Manning Community schools. In addition to the IKM Manning Community School district, there is also a Zion Lutheran preschool, and Kuemper Catholic School. The Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) has a Carroll County campus, and a Western Iowa Tech campus is within 30 minutes of Manning (Denison, Iowa). For students and families, Manning also provides a 24-hour recreation center with youth programs, workout classes, and up-to-date equipment.

Manning is built upon the values of getting involved in the community and contributing to the improvement in the town. Current tourist attractions include the Freedom Rock, the German Hausbarn, a historic Trinity Church, a golf course, and the improvement of their parks and trails. Since 2009, Manning has been a part of the Main Street America program, which works towards business improvement, design, promotion, and organization. Manning's Main Street (MSM) is a "cooperative support system between businesses, schools, the city, and all of economic development partners who promote Manning quality of life," (manningia.com). Small businesses on MSM include Deb's Corner Cafe, Brickhouse Brews, The Market Place, Kristina's Flowers, and the Main Street Liquor, Video and Tanning Shop.



The town's biggest current challenge is recruiting and increasing its resident population. Although their population has been increasing recently, Manning is looking to reach new target publics to diversify the town. Manning has a proven dedication to continuously improving the town for generations to come, which is shown through their success in receiving grants and funding. The funding has been used to put new energy into the community and businesses. The idea of raising a family in a future-oriented, innovative community is crucial to the target publics we will outline later on in this plan.

Product

We have divided Manning's product into three different subheadings; a) the idea that you can experience a higher quality of life in Manning, b) the behaviors that the target publics would partake in to influence them to move to Manning, and c) tangible objects Manning offers to influence this behavior including jobs, experiences and housing.

A.) The Product: Idea

The idea of Manning is focused around the values, opportunities, and experiences that small town Iowa has to offer. Manning values a safe, close-knit community where you can live a simple, safe, yet vibrant life. Their tagline of "It's Refreshing!" attempts to show how small-town life can be a break from the busy and hectic lifestyle that can come with an urban area. Further, Manning values building strong families and friendships, which is reflected in their ability to walk down Main Street and see only familiar faces.

Manning offers opportunities in areas such as small business, education, and community involvement and making a difference. Within Manning, we've identified a "Big Fish, Small Pond" scenario. Compared to urban areas, there are more opportunities to become a big player in community leadership, businesses, and in the education system for kids K-12 due to Manning's

small size and population. The town welcomes diversity in gender, age, and income within their leadership positions. Manning will help facilitate the ideas of newcomers for moving the community forward and will give you opportunities to become a leader.

B) The Product: Related Behaviors

The idea that Manning is an ideal place to live can influence prospective residents' related behaviors, including moving to or visiting the town. The community members feel as though a tour around the town and a closer look at all of the resources they have to offer could be enough to influence their target publics to move to Manning (Dawn). To get our target publics to see that moving to or visiting Manning is an option for them, they need to be made aware of what Manning has to offer. This may require tours through the school system, introduction to business opportunities, and what jobs and housing are available.

C) The Product: Objects

The goal of this plan would involve getting people to move to (or back to) Manning. And that would require their buying houses and getting jobs. Employment options may include positions from AG Processing, Inc., (a soybean processing plant), the hospital, IKM Manning school system, and Manning's hotel, Boulder Inn & Suites. Other job opportunities could come from the Main Street Manning program's continued development of business activity in the town. Even though there are jobs available, it is crucial that they be advertised and communicated to target publics via the internet, which will be elaborated on in further objectives within this communication plan. A struggle we have identified for Manning is their lack of housing for newcomers.

To address these shortcomings, Manning's website and other social media pages can be used to influence the behavior of convincing people to move to Manning. These platforms should feature attractive aspects of the community. They should also be used to share housing and job opportunities.

Target Publics

We have identified the following target publics for Manning: a) millennial couples looking to start a family or who already have children under the age of 10, b) future and current alumni from IKM high school, c) and tourists coming to Manning for the attractions. There are many aspects of Manning that work to attract these specific target publics.

Millennial couples

Manning's close-knit and supportive community, as well as their ability to keep up with the times is attractive to couples looking to raise children. Parents today are concerned with the level of education their children are receiving, in particular in areas such as one on one attention with teachers, advanced technology, and the ability to participate and stand out in extracurricular activities.

Manning's school district stands out among other rural towns in these areas, due to the funding within the community which allows for up-to-date technology and 21st century classrooms that surpass those in comparable sized towns. IKM Manning schools offer college preparatory classes, high computer-to-student ratios, and integrated teaching methods (Manning website). There are also opportunities for parents of students to get involved through committees, community organizations, events, and school activities (Manning website). Parents also have the opportunity to become close with each other in the community, which leads to a feeling of safety and security for their children. Manning's small student population also allows for its students to participate in as many sports activities as they choose, which leads to more playing time, attention from coaches, and quality of experience.

We recommend using Manning's internet presence (in particular their website and Facebook) as a communication channel to reach this target public. We will outline how to utilize these channels in our objectives below.

Future and Current Alumni of IKM High School

One of Manning's priority publics is alumni from IKM high school. The advantage of this public is their established familiarity with Manning and all it has to offer. This target public has already experienced the school systems, quality of life, and the connected community that is Manning. This audience may also have family and friends residing in Manning or nearby, which would be a positive aspect of relocating to the town. According to community members, having family and friends located in Manning has been a proven attraction to Manning's alumni who have moved back to start their families (Dawn). Bringing this public back to Manning also helps to reverse the effects of the phenomenon known as "brain drain" which is greatly affecting towns in the Midwest. Rural brain drain is when a town's "young brains" graduate high school and take their abilities and talents to larger cities instead of enriching the town they grew up in by staying.

In order to track the feelings of current high school students in Manning, we want to target the current 11th graders that are about to be the newest members of Manning's Alumni. We recommend communicating with the 11th graders specifically because they are still in Manning for a significant amount of time to gather information. This group is also at the age where they are beginning to think about college and leaving town. This is a good time for community members to meet with them about their plans, and plant the seed about returning post-college graduation. Manning community members have expressed their desire for a younger demographic to move to Manning, so the focus of this target public will be on the future alumni and younger alumni who have already graduated (approximately 35 and under).

Future and current alumni will require different communication tactics based on their age and technology usage. We recommend using Facebook, LinkedIn, and direct mail pieces as communication channels to reach this target public, which we will further outline in the objectives below.

Tourists

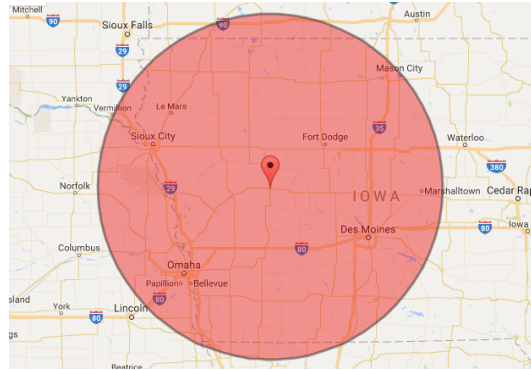
Manning is home to multiple historical yet contemporary German attractions, such as the German Haus Barn and Trinity Church. Tourists to be targeted are residents of surrounding counties such as Audubon, Crawford, and Shelby, as well as residents of larger cities such as Des Moines, Sioux City, or Omaha. Along with the attractions in the town, there are also well-maintained, up to date venues such as the beer garden, churches, and the party hall. These spaces are attractive for events such as weddings, conferences, and celebrations.

This public is beneficial to Manning because active tourism would put attention on the town that could translate to people wanting to move here. This ties into the idea that upon seeing Manning and becoming familiar with their resources, people would be sold on the town and willing to bring their lives here. Tourism is also economically beneficial to the businesses and their owners. Advertising Manning as a tourist spot will help to spread the idea of Manning by word of mouth, which could lead to an increase of interest in the town.

We recommend using Facebook advertising, a hashtag campaign across different social media platforms, and their website as communication channels to reach this target public.

Environment

Manning, Iowa, is a farm town located in Carroll County about 90 miles east of Des Moines. The surrounding counties include Audubon, Crawford, and Shelby. Manning is approximately 80 miles from the Des Moines metro area, 85 miles from the Omaha/Council Bluffs metro area, and under 100 miles from Sioux City (Manning proposal p. 3). Although Manning is a smaller, rural town, the residents are in close proximity to metropolitan areas which provides easy access to jobs, cultural activities, and resources that may not be in Manning.



Events within the area that would draw people back include their homecoming parades, Weihnachtsfest, and Kinderfest (German for Children’s Day), which is believed to be the oldest heritage celebration in Iowa. These events help to encourage face-to-face community engagement and should be advertised and showcased on social media for people who aren’t in the town. To reach a larger audience within the environment we have outlined above, it is recommend that Manning uses Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn as communication channels.



Summary of Objectives

This plan presents four objectives that work to create effective communication, interest, or draw to Manning. The objectives work to target millennial couples, alumni, and tourists. The respective objectives are designed to reach these publics through focus groups and surveys to alumni, rebranding Manning’s internet presence, and establishing events that will bring each public back to Manning.

The Plan

Problem Statement

Manning, Iowa, is experiencing growth in economic development and has proved itself to be a well-sustained, close-knit community. With the implementation of a strategic communication plan, Manning will be able to capitalize on its strengths to attract and retain residents.

Goal

To use this strategic communication plan to influence and attract the target publics to move or visit Manning, Iowa.

Objectives, Projects, and Tactics

Objective 1: To recruit the 57 current high school Juniors at IKM Manning High School for the alumni target public by April 2019.

Project 1: Identify which high school students would move back to Manning after college graduation. This project is to be completed by February of 2019.

Tactic 1: Decide who is going to lead the focus groups (suggestion: Shelly or Ron, someone who can plant the seed effectively).

Tactic 2: Develop a set of relevant questions that would provide the best feedback from students.

Tactic 3: Divide the 57 students into three separate groups and administer focus group.

Tactic 4: Observe and record the responses from the students.

Tactic 5: Based on group participation, evaluate if this was helpful for gaining knowledge on the students' perspective. Ask follow up questions.

Project 2: Develop a plan for how to respond to the data. This project is to be completed by April of 2019.

Tactic 1: Organize the responses collected by topic.

Tactic 2: Identify what resources Manning needs to improve upon in order for this target public to return after graduation.

Tactic 3: Document contact information from these students to maintain communication with them in following years.

Tactic 4: Identify positive feedback received (such as the close-knit community, or leadership opportunities) and make these discussion points when communicating with alumni over the next four years.

Project 3: Create a Facebook Group Page for this class of alumni. This project is to be completed by April of 2019.

Tactic 1: Add members of this class to the group.

Tactic 2: For students who do not have Facebook, identify an email address or mailing address they can be reached at.

Tactic 3: Identify class leaders (ex: 2 from each focus group) who are able to help with maintenance and upkeep of the group, as well as keep in touch with classmates who do not have Facebook.

Tactic 4: Have student leaders / focus group responder create an initial post in the group to set the tone, discuss goals, and encourage participation.

Tactic 5: To measure success of Objective 1, evaluate participation in focus group, whether or not strategic choices were made for improvement based on results, and whether or not the Facebook group was created and is immediately being used to interact with students.

Objective 2: To recruit the same group of 57 students from Objective 1 to evaluate how their needs have changed and what would influence them to move back to Manning. This evaluation is to be completed by April of 2020. (Objective 1 and Objective 2 serve a dual purpose of keeping communication lines open with Manning Alumni).

Project 1: Identify college students who would consider moving back to Manning post-graduation.

Tactics 1: Decide who will conduct the survey and who will be the designated responder with the alumni focus groups. We recommend this role be filled by the same person who conducted the focus group in objective 1.

Tactic 2: Develop survey questions based on jobs, housing, school system, etc. Implement the survey questions through the Facebook group previously created in Objective 1, Project 3.

Tactic 3: Obtain the results of the survey and organize the responses as seen fit. Analyze results and determine how helpful their feedback was by April 2021.

Tactic 4: Ask IKM alumni follow up questions through the Facebook group in May 2021.

Project 2: Identify what Manning has done to meet the needs of previous results.

Tactic 1: Separate and analyze the positive and negative feedback of the surveys administered to students thus far. (Areas that Manning has improved on / areas they need to progress in)

Tactic 2: Schedule phone calls to discuss with the respondents what their feedback was and why. Open up the communication line about returning to Manning and new events, businesses, etc. that are happening.

Tactic 3: Develop a digital newsletter to open up a communication channel with these alumni post-college graduation. Content should be written in a way that addresses the feedback from the survey and communicates the improvements made by Manning in the alumni's absence.

Tactic 4: Analyze actual statistics to gauge growth accomplished and map out possible ways to improve the town based on alumni feedback.

Objective 3: To update Manning's current internet presence, while also tracking their increase in followers and engagement on their social media platforms, website, and postings on job sites. As the content is updated, track the engagement and follower count to reach a 20% increase. This objective is to be completed by May of 2019.

Project 1: Update Manning's presence on social media platforms by January 2019.

Tactic 1: Identify a group of social media leaders to carry out updating and creating the pages.

Tactic 2: Utilize Facebook to target alumni (create Facebook groups for each graduating class to stay in touch).

Tactic 3: Create an Instagram to better showcase the events and opportunities happening in Manning. Limit who has authority over the account and posting abilities to maintain cohesion on this platform.

Tactic 4: Analyze social media statistics on members joined, following, and interacting with each page to gauge progress.

Project 2: Redesign the Manning Website by March 2019.

Tactic 1: Assess the current website and analyze what information on each page is absolutely crucial for their target publics to read and what is just fluff. The website holds a lot of information in large chunks of text, making it look outdated and overwhelming.

Tactic 2: Based on the assessment of what content already exists on the website from Tactic 1, reframe the website's main page, linked pages, and main menu to reflect the information that is working and deleting the information that is not. Push to a greater focus on family, schooling, and what the community is like.

Tactic 3: Move the content style to storytelling and qualitative proof of what the experience of living in Manning is like. Remove the administrative focused writing. This can be accomplished by adding high quality picture, video, and copy about what Manning does with their resources, not just stating that the resources exist.

Tactic 4: Once the content is reorganized and modernized, keep the content up to date so that viewers have something fresh to look at every week. This will encourage them to keep coming back so they don't miss content.

Tactic 5: Revamp the Manning Blog. Make it accessible for all community members to write their stories and experiences in the town. A blog facilitator will need to be assigned to regulate the blog posts and grammar, writing style, etc. to make sure it aligns with town values.

Tactic 6: Gauge progress of the remodeled site by analyzing page traffic and engagement by viewers.

Project 3: Make housing and jobs accessible to outsiders a priority on other internet platforms. Link to these listings on the Manning website by May 2019.

Tactic 1: Create a committee focused on growth and development of their housing market.

Tactic 2: Advertise all updated listings of available housing on Zillow.

Tactic 3: Create a committee focused on growth and development of their job market.

Tactic 4: Create a LinkedIn page for listing job opportunities in order to make outsider millennial couples and community members aware of the jobs available in Manning.

Tactic 5: Collect and register all job openings onto LinkedIn, Zip Recruiter, Indeed, and Glassdoor.

Tactic 6: Monitor follower growth, page traffic, and engagement by viewers on these platforms to determine the success of job and real estate postings.

Objective 4: To develop four events and experiences for the target publics of alumni, residents from neighboring towns, and millennial families by December of 2019 for the calendar year of 2020.

Project 1: Develop a tour of the IKM Manning school district aimed at millennial couples with children. The tour should showcase the features that make Manning schools stand out, such as the 21st century classrooms, 3D printer, Mac computers, etc.

Tactic 1: Identify leaders within the school such as the principal or teachers who could form a committee to run the tours as requested by newcomers.

Tactic 2: Create a tab on the Manning website that makes it accessible to outsiders to schedule a school tour.

Tactic 3: Keep statistics to see how many people set up a tour through the website, and how many of these tours led to new students attending IKM Manning schools.

Project 2: Develop a “Main Street Block Party” targeted at millennial couples with children.

Tactic 1: Identify business owners on Main Street who would participate in the block party and sponsor the event. Each business could have giveaways, raffles, or a special theme.

Tactic 2: Create a schedule throughout the day of kids-themed events including jumping houses, games, arts and crafts, music, food, etc.

Tactic 3: Create a marketing campaign for the block party targeted at millennials. This should include paid advertising to neighboring towns on Facebook, creating posters and flyers to put up in neighboring towns, and mail pieces to residents of Manning and Carroll.

Tactic 4: Keep track of how much interaction there is on social media.

Tactic 5: Record attendance and ask attendees what they like and don't like about the block party.

Project 3: Engage tourists through hosted tours and experiences.

Tactic 1: Create a wedding venue tour. The tour should showcase the preserved church in Manning, catering and floral options, as well as the beer garden and other reception sites.

Tactic 2: On the Manning Website, create a tab to schedule a wedding venue tour for tourists.

Tactic 3: Establish event space listings for business meetings, birthdays, weddings, beer garden, etc.

Tactic 4: Ask tourists to take a survey at the end to see what they liked and didn't like. Record the results. Implement strategic choices based on survey results to improve venue sites.

Project 4: Develop an annual homecoming reunion event for to draw alumni back to Manning.

Tactic 1: Utilize Facebook groups that were created in Objective 1 to engage alumni and invite them to the event.

Tactic 2: Recruit the designated leaders of the group who were chosen in Objective 1 to help plan the event and reach out to members of their class that are not engaging on the Facebook page.

Tactic 3: Reach out to local businesses for sponsorships of the event and designation of an event venue.

Tactic 4: Evaluate attendance and ask for feedback via the alumni Facebook page.

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