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Manning
IT'S REFRESHING!

“Home Is Where Manning Is”

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Executive Summary

The “Home Is Where Manning Is” strategic plan details objectives, projects, and tactics directed at aiding Manning, Iowa in becoming a more sustainable rural community. This plan will provide structure and guidelines for activities through 2019. Manning aims to increase its population by retaining current residents and attracting new ones, and this plan primarily targets young families and millennials to achieve that goal.

Background

O.H. Manning founded Manning, Iowa in 1881. The town of about 1,500 is located halfway between Omaha and Des Moines, about 80 miles from each. German immigrants were originally attracted to Manning because it reminded them of their homeland. Manning has stayed true to its German roots with tourist attractions like the Hausbarn and events like Weihnachtsfest, or “German Christmas.”

Manning has since developed into a sustainable rural community that has shown diligence in their strides to grow in the future. Manning is growing through strong, local, regional, state, and university partnerships. The future of their school, housing and job opportunities lies within the residences and neighboring community members of Manning. With an unemployment rate of less than two percent, the people of Manning are a diverse group, with locally-employed residents and residents who work remotely from their homes or make short commutes to larger cities.

Manning is one of 52 Main Street nationally-certified communities in the state under guidance of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Main Street Manning’s historic downtown is home to a variety of local shops, restaurants and businesses. Main Street is a federal program that is administered by the state, which gives Manning access to grants. This is one of the reasons the town can keep taxes low while also completing projects.

Manning, Iowa has a long history of sustainability practices, such as working with the DNR to develop water protection plans and reducing energy costs.

1. The Product

We have studied the Manning project with a three-part “product” in mind, namely, a.) the idea of a higher quality of life in Manning, b.) behaviors that potential residents might engage in to move there, i.e. finding and taking jobs or that Manning might engage in to attract and retain residents, and c.) tangible objects that might make that possible, including housing.

A.) PRODUCT: THE IDEA OF MANNING

The “idea” of Manning offers a strong starting place. The town has a statewide reputation for its vision and sustainability. These two areas are key in retaining residents. The town’s leadership created the City Comprehensive Plan in 2017 with this in mind. The key goals of the plan include improving housing, parks and recreation, historic preservation, downtown district vitality, economic development, and tourism.

Manning offers its residents the chance to be a big fish in a small pond, even for young people. Eight of the ten people on the Main Street board are under 40, and other groups share the trait of being diverse in terms of age. This type of diversity fosters new ideas and promotes a culture of inclusion and acceptance while driving innovation and progression.

Another draw of Manning is that it provides people with a simpler and safer life than they may otherwise have. Manning allows people to know their neighbors, live relatively safe from crime, and enjoy an easy commute.

Manning residents enjoy a high quality of life in an area with affordable cost-of-living. Its mix of education, safety, and convenience make it an attractive destination for young families. These are all reasons why Manning is “refreshing”.

B.) PRODUCT: RELATED BEHAVIORS

Manning has done much to make itself attractive to new residents. As described here, Manning’s partnerships also increase the town’s sustainability. Manning has strong local, regional, state, and university partnerships with the end goal of creating a better place to live, and operates under the mantra “partnerships breed success.”

Further, the town’s website states that “the overriding goal of Manning is not to survive, but to thrive.” This is reflected in Manning’s history of sustainable practices. The town has worked with the DNR to develop the Source Water Protection Plan, which addressed water quality and quantity issues. Another example is the steps Manning has taken to reduce energy costs and become more efficient. The Manning Betterment Foundation and Manning Community Foundation aim to improve the area in many different ways. These points are evidence of Manning’s commitment to becoming the model of rural sustainability and its diligent commitment to ensuring Manning’s success far into the future.

One other way this commitment is demonstrated is through the Main Street Program, which is administered by the state and thus has access to grants. Manning has received almost \$5 million over the last five years through this and other funding programs, which is the primary reason the town is able to keep taxes low while also completing projects.



Figure 1: Manning's Main Street: includes store fronts of local businesses.

These projects intertwine to improve the economy, quality of life, arts, and culture of Manning in addition to funding street repair, trails, housing, parks and recreation, and more. That infrastructure enabled Manning to win the inaugural "Small Business Community of the Year" award, which is indicative of its ability to create jobs. Unemployment in Manning is below two percent.

Manning has much to offer residents and visitors, alike. Manning has the number one tourist attraction in rural Iowa, the Hausbarn, which shows Manning's deep German heritage. German immigrants were originally drawn to Manning in 1881 because it reminded them of their homeland. Every year the town holds a "German Christmas" known as Weihnachtsfest.

There are also five churches and many religious groups in Manning. In 2012, an annual event called C-3 (Christ, Celebration, and Community) was created to celebrate religion. It is one example of the strong religious traditions in Manning.

The Kuemper Catholic School System in neighboring Carroll offers a religious schooling opportunity for interested families. The IKM-Manning School District governs the public education system in Manning. The education system is flourishing with its technological growth and 3D printing.

Manning is extremely farmer and hunter friendly with an attractive John Deere Center, multiple auto centers, and a gun shop located on Main Street (Figure 1).

Notably, Manning's population increased from 2010 to 2015 and its assessed value growth was above state average, driving home the point that Manning is an attractive small town to relocate to. Stressing these attributes highlights Manning's superlatives and reaffirms its potential as an appealing small community.

C.) PRODUCT: TANGIBLE OBJECTS

Like many other rural townships in the Midwest and nationwide, Manning faces a shortage of housing and employment opportunities, which would provide the tangible means to attract new residents. The town's leadership views housing as a distinct opportunity to distinguish itself. One of the key goals from Manning's 2017 City Comprehensive Plan was to establish itself as a town where people can live while working in the surrounding area. This would increase Manning's population and make it a more sustainable small town without needing to increase job opportunities.

Still, jobs remain an issue. One way to create more jobs is to encourage the Latin American community to move to Manning. This would make the area more diverse in addition to offering new opportunities for the community. Targeting nearby Latin American communities such as Denison, Iowa, is a viable and realistic approach to promoting business movement. Denison is part of neighboring Crawford county, which has the highest percentage of Latin Americans of any county in the state (27.9 percent), according to the Iowa Data Center.

The mission of Main Street Manning is to preserve the historic look while stimulating business, recreational, and residential growth. With Manning's Main Street developing, it allows new business owners to seek the proper opportunity they need. Moving to Manning to start a new business will allow the community to come together to welcome not only the new family, but the new business. Community efforts to support business is something that Manning takes pride in.

Manning's small size allows for great potential in business opportunities and the ability to strengthen their local economy. Manning's goal to grow its businesses not only opens opportunity for entrepreneurs and business owners, but provides job opportunities for construction workers, only 2.9% of the population. Increased needs for new buildings and housing opens opportunity for many other trades.

Manning's tight knit community comes together to create a welcoming lifestyle for its members. Housing costs, healthcare, cost of living and quality of life are attractive to retiring boomers. The median home value of Manning, Iowa is \$74,000, with a median income of \$42,548 which emphasizes its livability. Quality of life coincides with the and the "refreshing" image Manning wishes to promote. Between the community volunteer programs, efforts to support local businesses, and recreational events and programs, Manning ensures that the environment that surrounds the town is traditional, and refreshing.

2. Target publics

Alumni families with young children: Manning wants to attract families with young kids or those ready to have kids. More specifically, Manning shows interest in people who have left Manning to start their families, but are now willing to come back. Many of these people are between 22 and 45 and are more likely to have an established career and a desire to settle down. Manning is looking for families to fill their schools, enjoy the recreational activities, and become a part of their tight knit, growing community. Involving such families in this community would be most effective if the media platforms adjusted to the millennial lifestyle. We will be able to reach this market through career readiness groups, professional development organizations, and Future Ready Iowa. Further, while newspaper subscriptions are dwindling, online subscriptions are growing. Using pages like the Des Moines Register's website could be another effective way to gear toward young families. E-newsletters and online mailings where we can carefully craft our message and deliver it straight to our target audience are other options worth considering.

Millennials: There are many ways to reach our potential audience. Social media is an important form of communication for millennials, so reaching out on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat would be an effective way to gain interest. More online sources that can be utilized are the Manning town website and college and university websites. Millennials and other young people would be more receptive to these channels because they spend more time online than any other age group, making this an efficient, cheap way to reach the audience.

People coming from metropolitan areas: Manning offers many of the opportunities available in big cities without any of the hassle. Residents can get anything they need in town, commute without worrying about traffic, and work from home. That convenience could be a big draw for people living in cities like Omaha or Des Moines. Manning also has a low crime rate which could attract people from the city looking for a safer community. Manning offers its residents the ability to be a big fish in a small pond, which fosters a sense of importance and relevance that may be absent when living in a big city. People in small towns like Manning can become more involved in their community by joining boards and committees, for example. This target public can be reached by newspaper advertisements, in the Des Moines Register for example, as well as Facebook advertisements that are specifically targeted to metropolitan areas.

Smaller college graduates and health care students: Once people graduate from their University they are able to move forward and begin the next chapter of their life, and career. For some people coming from smaller universities, moving to a larger city may be in their best interest, while others from those small schools tend to want to stay at the pace that they have been at. Manning can offer affordable lifestyles with nearby opportunities for anyone starting their careers. Focusing in on students studying health care can also be beneficial considering the Manning Regional Healthcare Center. These post graduates will be able to continue to live at the pace they are most comfortable while gaining a great community feeling. This can be made aware to these students by setting up booths at career fairs, or in main common areas of select campuses. We can also work through previously-established channels like teachers and counselors. These people have an incentive to keep young people around and are in a position to advocate for Manning. Students are more willing to listen to their teachers, so using them as a resource provides a human strategy. More education-based approaches include setting up booths during Iowa Private College Week and creating or targeting scholarship programs.

Latin American Populations: Denison, a neighboring city to the west, has the highest percentage of Latin Americans of any city in Iowa, with 45.7 percent of their population being Hispanic. Manning representatives have the desire to grow in diversity and bring in other ethnic groups. The addition of this population would not only encourage ethnic and cultural diversity, but would help expand the lack of diversity in Manning. Ways to reach this audience include the Denison Bulletin, the Denison Chamber of Commerce, and Denison community schools. The Chamber of Commerce would help promote business movement into Manning and the schools would encourage more diversity in Manning's district.

Tourists: Manning prides itself on its German heritage and is home to several tourism attractions. A German Hausbarn (Figure 2) that was built in 1660 and relocated to Manning in 1999 shows the lasting quality of German engineering and is a popular wedding venue. Alongside is the Leet-Hassler Farmstead, which showcases 8 buildings preserved in their original form, built in 1910. Also in town is the Forgotten Corner Museum, which contains antique farm equipment and household items.



Figure 2: Hausbarn, Manning gained this from Germany in 1999

3. Environment

Located in rural western Iowa about 80 miles from Omaha and Des Moines, Manning doesn't have the traditional features of a more complex city. But what it lacks in size and stature, it makes up for in its sense of place. Manning prides itself on its sense of community and first-name basis relationships. The town frequently holds festivals, game nights and other fun events that encourage community engagement.

Manning's proximity to Omaha and Des Moines is indicative of the different opportunities the town's location provides. There are unique mixes of entertainment, lifestyle, and opportunity both in Manning and the surrounding areas. Reaching mid-sized surrounding towns near Manning is something that can gage great communication efforts to bring them to Manning's schools, hospital, and businesses. The high school draws students from surrounding towns, which means they are familiar with Manning.



Figure 3: Manning's hospital

People who live in neighboring rural Iowa, who commute and work in Manning, understand the way of life in small towns. Manning is surrounded by several other small town Iowa towns, where people know the way of life. If we conduct a communication objective that will sway those people who work in Manning to then move there for convenience, it would provide a way to grow the population. To be able to reach these publics in this environment we will be seeking media like Facebook and other social media outlets. Also newspapers and advertising outlets to target the generations that surround Manning who appear to utilize older forms of legacy media.

Manning's neighboring towns: The towns surrounding Manning's 20-mile radius are able to utilize the resources and schooling that Manning has to offer. Nearby towns include Denison, Carroll, Coon Rapids, Templeton, Audubon, Manilla, Defiance, as shown in the image below:

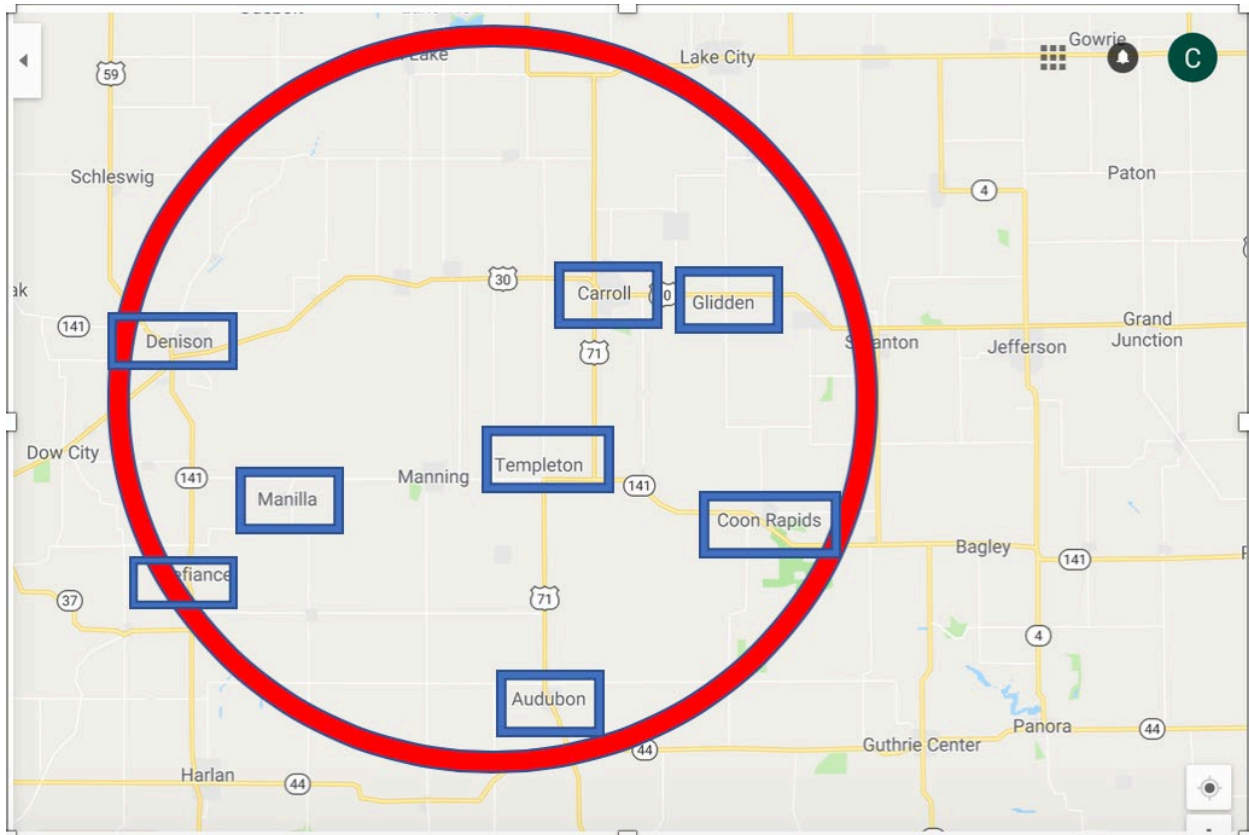


Figure 4: Manning and its surrounding towns.

What does Manning have to offer? Its school system is extremely attractive, offering top-notch technology like 3D printers and hands-on teaching. Their track and field, baseball stadium and recreational center provide the perfect place for sporting events and competition with other nearby schools.

The town has a strong sense of community and family, a highlight of rural life. Most residents are familiar with each other and communicate on a first name basis. Families are willing to help assist one another and while this is a positive for current residents, such a tightly-knit social environment could potentially be a drawback for prospective residents looking to integrate into the community.

Manning values diverse backgrounds and experiences. Supporting community input when developing plans and completing community-driven projects are strong points in Manning. Opinions are sought from long-time residents, new residents, and people who visit Manning. Getting a wide-range of opinions during the planning process ensures a wide range of representation when moving into a volunteer-based implementation.

OBJECTIVE SUMMARY

Objective 1 - collect data to determine what current Manning residents think about the community and their experience living there.

Objective 2 - target people from neighboring town and encourage them to consider residing in Manning.

Objective 3 - promote entrepreneurs in the area to increase small business opportunities.

Objective 4 – develop a stronger social media presence to engage and attract younger community members.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Manning lacks a strategic communication plan to sustain efforts that involve attracting new residents and retaining current residents.

Part Two: Strategic Plan

GOAL

This plan will provide a communications strategy to reach and influence former residents to relocate to and reside in Manning.

Objectives, Projects, and Tactics

OBJECTIVE 1: Gather data and determine variations in likeability from target publics by October 1, 2019.

Target publics: *Young adults (high school and college) from Manning & middle-aged former residents of Manning*

Budget: Allocate paid time for a Manning social media employee to create and distribute survey and analyze results.

Project 1: Administer the survey, notice trends and develop a plan of action based off the information presented.

Tactics:

1. Create a list of questions asking people what their factors are that play in to making a decision to decide where to live.
2. Find online site to host the survey; make the survey live to collect data between July 1 and September 30, 2019.
3. Distribute survey via email contact list, from Manning alumni lists
4. Add survey link to the City of Manning Facebook page as well as the Manning City website.
5. Create and contact list of high school guidance counselors and college admissions staff to distribute survey.

Project 2: Conduct a survey for 2 target publics: middle-aged Manning residents and middle-aged former residents of Manning (aged 30-50)

Tactics:

1. Create a list of questions asking 1st target public what influenced their decision to continue to live in Manning.
2. Create a list of questions asking 2nd target public what influenced their decision to leave Manning.
3. Find online site to host the survey; make the survey live to collect data between July 1 and September 30, 2019.
4. Distribute survey via email contact list from Manning alumni lists.
5. Add survey link to the City of Manning Facebook page, Instagram and Twitter as well as the Manning City website.
6. Create and contact list of high school graduates and determine which of them still reside in Manning and which don't, then administer surveys accordingly.

Project 3: Analyze the responses and synthesize them based on the target publics grouping

Tactics:

1. Collect the responses via whichever method the respondent used (mail, email, online, etc.)
2. Create a task force to review each response individually
3. Group each response based on the respondent's fit into our target publics
4. Examine the responses for common desires in Manning
5. Report the findings to City Council

Project 4: Develop a focus group with IKM High School Juniors and Seniors to determine their attitudes towards relocating or remaining in Manning post-graduation.

Tactics:

1. Create a list of questions and talking points aimed at determining the participants' likelihood of staying in Manning.
2. Conduct multiple focus groups with a mixture of Juniors and Seniors in each.
3. Analyze participants' long-term life goals, aspirations, and values in order to correlate those values with the values of Manning and prospective residents.
4. Post focus group prompts on social media to increase sample size
5. Collect and analyze results in November 2019.

OBJECTIVE 2: Attract people from neighboring towns

Target publics: *Residents from neighboring towns*

Project 1: Develop an event calendar for the next 6 months with fun-packed activities friendly to multiple age groups. By October 1, 2019.

Tactics:

1. Create fun activities for holidays and annual mainstream events
2. Reach out to local singers, bands and other talent about future performances
3. Contact shops like The Market Place, New Hope Bargain Shop, Brickhaus Brews and Spies Fur Co. about hosting social events based around crafting, wine, music, etc.
4. Utilize TripAdvisor to post event calendar on their website
5. Contacts neighboring town newsletters, newspapers, and magazines to discuss the addition of Manning's event calendar in each

Project 2: Create a Housing plan to increase availability of space for incoming residents

Tactics:

1. Assess the current market conditions for housing development
2. Assess environmental conditions to locate appropriate sites for building, taking into consideration public utilities, sewage systems, proximity to schooling and proximity to occupation
3. Find funding and sponsorship for the development plan and set a budget
4. Determine a specific quantitative plan for the number of additional housing developments that will be added over the course of a set time period
5. Evaluate incoming residents' housing needs and preferences based off of income, and occupation, family dynamics, etc.
6. Find a contractor willing to get on board with the Manning growth plan that understands the need for additional housing

OBJECTIVE 3: Promote entrepreneurship and increase the amount of businesses in the area

Target Publics: Local residents who are business owners or aspire to be. By January 1, 2021.

Project 1: Develop an entrepreneurship program for IKM-Manning High School

Tactics:

1. Research other existing High School Entrepreneurship programs
2. Add new concepts to current mathematics courses to educate students about the financial side of business start-ups
3. Create an after-school leadership program
4. Encourage students to join leadership after school program with additions like "free pizza", friendly competitions with prizes and other incentives
5. Set up guest speakers to come to Manning and speak to students

6. Possible guest speakers could include students in entrepreneurial programs at neighboring universities like the University of Iowa or young college graduates that have started their own businesses

Project 2: Get a story about Manning's businesses in the *Des Moines Register* and other state publications

Tactics:

1. Prepare a pitch letter that includes information about Manning receiving the Inaugural Small Business Community Award, its convenient location, and its diverse workforce.
2. Send the pitch letter to writers at the *Des Moines Register* other publications like the *Sioux City Journal*, *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, or *Iowa City Press-Citizen*
3. Work with the writer and convey to him or her the message we want to send about Manning and clearly communicate our desired outcome

OBJECTIVE 4: Working toward making a better social media presence for the Manning community. By January 1, 2020.

Target Publics: Millennials, People coming from larger cities, younger families looking to reside, current residents, potential residents

Project 1: Advance social media presence to more popular platforms.

Tactics:

1. Hire an outside party to help create and design Instagram and Twitter accounts for the community of Manning.
2. Ensure the person hired has the skills to fully uses these platforms, and also understands the background of Manning in depth..
3. Once advanced into the social media platforms Instagram and Twitter, begin getting the word out via flyers and posts on current social media platform (Facebook) about new platforms.
4. Delegate all responsibilities regarding the social media platform to one person, who specifically holds a title as social media representative.
5. To ensure their complete knowledge on being proactive on social media, then send the social media representative to social media workshops, conferences, or an educational.
6. Once knowledge from social media outside parties and ideas from tactic 5 is developed, brand Manning's current community Facebook page to match the Instagram and Twitter pages.
7. Actively tweet news updates, event times, community gatherings, etc. on Twitter.
8. Create photos that follow the "Tweet" ideas from tactic 7 to post to Instagram for a visual effect for the followers.
9. Continuously grow and moderate these profiles for full effect. Promote brand of Manning to all followers.

Project 2: Re-filming the featured “Manning: It’s Refreshing,” video, show more of what Manning has to offer.

Tactics:

1. Reach out to a University Journalism or Film student in need of experience. Create an internship opportunity for a student to enhance the videos production, content and message to overall better the video.
2. Work with University staff to provide either a professor or graduate student in the same field of study to act as a mentor for the selected student.
3. Set up application process through University media. End interview process with face-to-face contact about their knowledge behind the ideas and futuristic view on Manning’s brand.
4. Select an applicant that would best know the culture, surroundings and idea behind the project.
5. Set a list of guidelines that the student must follow that cover the following; Must aim the story to appeal to a younger audience, shed light on the importance of having a diverse culture in Manning, must contain 2-3 people who have lived in Manning but now reside elsewhere, highlight the unique features that Manning has to offer (i.e. Hausbarn, Manning Regional Healthcare Center, Mainstreet, school system, etc.).
6. Provide project/internship deadline for 2-3 months from start date to ensure enough time to create the most effective form of the message, as well as having the video finished promptly.

Project 3: Update the Manning website layout to increase fluidity on desktop and mobile viewing platforms.

Tactics:

1. Hire or consult a web designer to discuss improvements in website layout and navigation.
2. Design new layout with mobile-viewing in mind as more and more people access the internet through their smartphone or tablet.
3. Update photographs, videos and thumbnail content to the highest quality possible.
4. Avoid using photographs that give the website a dated look.
5. Continually update the homepage of website to display upcoming events taking place in Manning.

Citations

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