



FREMONT

Michigan

"NOW AND ALWAYS -- A Fine City • A Great Community"

CITY OF FREMONT

STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN

Background

The City of Fremont is located in West Michigan approximately 45 miles north of Grand Rapids. The Fremont community year-round residential population is approximately 14,000, possesses a high quality of life with a multitude of hiking trails, non-motorized paths, parks, beach, festivals and events, and community amenities such as public art, recreation leagues and a performing arts center. Many of these assets were acquired through a combination of strong public and private partnerships and leadership by the philanthropic community.

Fremont Public School's new High School ranks amongst the 'techiest' schools in the nation and Fremont's very own Gerber Memorial Hospital is part of the Spectrum Health hospital system, recognized as a leading health institution, as evidenced by its many awards and recognitions. In addition, the area features numerous successful local, national and international companies providing an array of career paths and competitive wages, all of which leads to a resilient year-round economy and tax base for the community.

As a municipality, the City is a full-service municipal organization operating under a home rule, Council / Manager form of government. Historically known as the "Baby Food Capital of the World", Fremont City Council and its employees pride themselves on being a community that offers a high quality of life, exceptional customer service and dynamic delivery of services. With surrounding municipalities also experiencing steady growth over the past 5 years, Fremont has expressed interest in attracting appropriate infill development. Through strategic development and redevelopment, the City expects continued economic growth and opportunities for new residents to move into the City.

For Fremont to position itself for the rapid regional growth taking place in West Michigan, the City is seeking to achieve the MEDC's Redevelopment Ready Certification to ensure development best practices are woven throughout the City's strategic planning and municipal services, including:

- Streets & Transportation
- Utilities – Water, Wastewater & Storm water
- Economic Development
- Development in the Industrial Park
- Community Development, Neighborhood & Planning services
- General Aviation Airport
- Parks, Recreation Natural Areas & Cultural Facilities
- Support Services (Leadership, Information Technology, Communication)



Strategic Marketing Introduction

In an effort to capture redevelopment opportunities in the City of Fremont, the Fremont City Council and City Manager supported the City's participation in the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program. The City has benefitted from its participation with RRC by receiving best practice recommendations from the RRC evaluation of its development programs and services for quality and efficiency.

This Fremont Strategic Marketing Plan and the Economic Development Plan have recently been crafted to create a framework and action plan for effectively promoting the City of Fremont's services, community activities, events and other economic opportunities to current and potential community members, visitors, the business community, and investors with the objective of motivating them to:

- Invest in the City of Fremont through development, redevelopment and job creation
- Live in the City of Fremont
- Participate in public meetings/activities
- Support local businesses and community events
- Share information about Fremont with their networks
- Comment and engage on all City social media platforms

The Strategic Marketing Plan outlines an organized way to communicate that will ensure the best marketing methods and accurate information will be disseminated on a timely and regular basis. The plan is intended to be an easy to follow roadmap for the variety of marketing tasks that need to be completed to further the City's goals of:

- Attracting new business and investment to Fremont
- Driving more traffic and sales to Fremont businesses
- Increasing awareness of Fremont's amenities, facilities and services
- Achieving regional and national media exposure for the City
- Garnering outside interest in visiting, living and/or doing business in Fremont
- Encouraging visits to the City's website
- Continue improving communications with community, County and State partners

Target Audiences

1. Community Members

(corporations, general community, service/retail businesses, community organizations, property owners from outside the area)

2. Investors (local and non-local)

3. Neighboring Communities (Newaygo, Grant, White Cloud, Hesperia, Muskegon, Grand Rapids)

4. News Media (Times Indicator, Near North Now, WGHN, MLive Media Group, Fox17, WoodTV8, WZZM, etc.)

5. Visitors (Regional, National and International)

Marketing Responsibilities

The strategies outlined in the marketing plan will only be successful if the City is able to have shared responsibility between staff, appointed officials and elected officials in collaboration with its area partners. Success of the strategies outlined in the marketing plan will rest heavily on a combined effort of the City, Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitor's Bureau and other local affiliate organizations. The goals of the Plan will only be met through a shared commitment to implement the strategies outlined below and delivered to the target marketing audiences.

Marketing Channels

The following pages contain an outline of marketing channels, general content and success measures the City plans to utilize to execute the Strategic Marketing Plan and objectives previously outlined. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list as there may be other means of communicating that the City may decide to deploy which will be reviewed and may be added to the strategy.

This is a working document and revisions will be made as necessary as part of an annual business planning process, possibly in conjunction with City Council's annual strategic planning and capital project planning session each spring.

It is important to acknowledge that key influences within the marketing and promotions field will change regularly. Demographic makeups and consumption of information through technological advancements will influence service delivery and customer expectations in the future.

Through the Fremont Strategic Marketing Plan the following marketing channels will be used:

- Event marketing
- Technology marketing
- Public relations
- Media relations

Brand Advertising: The City completed a logo with a short branding statement some time ago: "Now and Always - A Fine City - A Great Community." In the execution of branding, Fremont has entailed use of a consistent city logo, color and font, with the statement below it. Branding is significant because it guarantees the City seeks excellence in its mission to keep Fremont a great community. Branding enhances consumer confidence and certifies a consistent message has been thoroughly developed, inspected and vetted. Although the City has many partnerships with brand name organizations, ie. like the Fremont Chamber of Commerce, Fremont Area Community Foundation, United Way and Rotary. The City will continue its efforts to maintain its standalone community brand. The City will seek to mirror the core community values expressed in the Master Plan and continue to review opportunities to reinforce its public image. Opportunities may include official City publications, City website/social media, City vehicles, presentations, way-finding signage and more. Consistent branding helps legitimize the City's public service work and is recognizable to the public.

Event Marketing: Event marketing is a critical advertising and promotional tool designed to focus on community interaction via a live event, such as a sporting or social event, or to bring a product or service to the attention of the public. The City benefits from these types of events by reinforcing the City's brand, improving face-to-face communications, driving additional newsletter subscriptions, and creating opportunities to make new connections with residents and businesses.

For City hosted, co-hosted or sponsored events, the appropriate City department involved in the event will be required to work with the event organizers as soon as possible to develop strategies to maximize available funding to reach larger markets. In addition, the City shall seek to capitalize on opportunities to distribute marketing materials (i.e. newsletter, stickers, informational flyers, magnets, etc.) at various community events.



If an organization or promoter solicits the City to partner or host an event, the City staff will meet with event organizers to determine a sponsorship package that leverages the City's investment in the event. To determine if the City will host/sponsor an event, clear requirements and screening processes are needed. To help fund City events, businesses within the City will be encouraged to assist with financial sponsorships or in-kind services/donations. Sponsorship is beneficial for both parties. Local businesses that get involved in sponsoring a City event are expressing their belief in our future growth by their support. In turn, they will gain recognition as a partner with the City and profit from displaying their logo/marketing materials to community residents.

Technology Marketing: Technology marketing can help the Community and Economic Development staff communicate to a much broader, world-wide audience of prospective visitors and employers. Because of its' speed and efficiency, this method represents a very cost-effective strategy with near limitless potential to reach intended audiences. The most effective technology marketing strategies are those that result in a steady stream of targeted leads over time. Utilizing this marketing channel will produce website traffic, brand awareness, on-going connection to target audiences and encourage visitor and business relocations many years into the future.

The City's website is its' major component for Technology Marketing. The website should be utilized as a central location to provide information the City wants to convey to all target audiences. While other social media platforms can and should be used to share information, the website provides a way to provide accurate details and facts in an easy to view manner.

Social media platforms like Facebook should also be used to enhance how information is shared, while being careful not to assume it can replace all the valuable information on the website. Facebook can be used to distribute news stories or public services information to users in a quick fashion, even when they may not be searching for it.

The City must put social media to work by means of actively using Facebook. Use of Facebook should be designed and implemented to achieve specific goals that support the overall marketing strategy. The City must identify how it will be managed, including the frequency of updates, who will be responsible for updates and what means will be used to report on the activities and how its effectiveness will be measured. Social networking sites like Facebook provide a virtual community for people interested in a particular subject or looking to increase their circle of acquaintances. The City will continue to evolve its' City and Police Department profiles and share relevant information. The City can communicate with others by making their latest news and announcements public in a blog-like format or via email. Social media platforms are adaptable to meet a variety of goals and can assist the City by creating awareness, locating leads and prospects, generating discussion, building local business communities and increasing traffic to the City's website.

Success Measures

Technology Marketing requires new approaches to developing marketing strategies and predicting results, which are very different from traditional advertising. Unlike other media, every impression on the Internet is logged and reach numbers are commonly reported. The City will measure effectiveness with click-through rate (CTR), conversion rate, unique visitor numbers and website traffic data provided by the back end of the City website as well as analytics from other sites the City is using. Regular tracking of this data will allow the City to evaluate the level of engagement through on-line sources.

Public Relations: Public relations have been performed for decades by the City staff. As with other strategies and activities that were assessed to prepare this plan, public relations activities had previously been performed informally without standardized evaluation and measurement. Now that the City has identified target audiences, its brand and its desired messages, public relations may be one of its most strategic and effective tools provided by this plan. In today's economy, collaboration is critical to community and economic development success. If the City effectively seeks and develops partnerships and collaborative ventures, it should result in measurable outcomes. Public Relations is about telling stories and bringing a place to life through those stories.

The goal of an effective public relations strategy is to make Fremont "real" by discovering and sharing its' stories, especially human interest type stories. We will take a proactive approach to sharing Fremont's stories beginning with the City's quarterly publication, the "Fremont City Beat!" It is important that the City continuously reinforce its brand by spreading Fremont's story by word-of-mouth as well. Residents of Fremont also play a critical part in emphasizing the message that Fremont is "a fine City - a great community."

The City needs to encourage existing businesses throughout Fremont to share their stories, successes, and news announcements as a way for the City to generate stories of the community. Serving as an extension of other media channels, the City can help identify and share those stories. This effort will help position and promote Fremont as a business leader and effectively carry the City's brand forward to the target markets previously identified in the plan.

Media Relations: Based on the City's specified target audiences, key messages and "news pitch" ideas should be generated to engage with various media outlets. To disseminate these messages and stories the City will need to expand upon current media contacts and identify and develop a media database (print/online/video) that serves target audiences. Working with City staff, target markets will be matched with specialty media sources to provide additional mass media outreach with specific community features and news angles. With an active social networking platform and a communication plan that includes website bulletins and quarterly newsletter mailings, the City serves as a primary news source by, for and about itself. An effective media relations campaign incorporates both functional and emotional messages, generates third-party endorsements, facilitates communication, and increases visibility. Media relations play an important role in City branding and offer an opportunity to connect with its' current and prospective stakeholders. These story ideas will be based on several things:

- 1.) The public relations objective
- 2.) The strongest stories/news
- 3.) The media interest/category
- 4.) The editorial calendars/opportunities

Potential Media Tools:

- Press Releases: City staff will regularly issue press releases of important decisions, events, project updates, and general information that will positively market the City of Fremont,
- Signage, Banners and Advertising: The City may consider collaborating with local businesses to sponsor the purchase and display of community banners, renderings or posters for public events and dedication ceremonies. When doing so, the City will seek low-cost opportunities to market itself in various local publications on multi-media platforms.
- Community engagement may range from informational booths, displays, social media, and Q&A sessions.
- Market events, projects, news and other community happenings on the city's website, Facebook and community buildings.
- PowerPoint Presentation: The City has developed topic-specific presentations from time to time as necessary to deliver to news media and community organizations to help share information.
- Collateral Materials: The City may want to develop issue driven marketing pieces to share information, market a City-sponsored/hosted event or address a topic that will reinforce the City's brand.

Media Contacts: As relationships and new media is created, the contacts on the media list may need to be added, redefined or modified. Constant upkeep of these records is vital to the success of the media relations component of this plan.

PRINT – Times Indicator (local newspaper), Newaygo County Visitors Guide, MLive Media Group, Fremont City Beat Newsletter, Muskegon Chronicle

EXTERNAL BUILDINGS (bulletin boards) – Fremont Area District Library, City buildings, Public Schools

ONLINE MEDIA – Fremont website (www.cityoffremont.net), Facebook, Near North Now, Chamber E-news

Marketing of Development & Redevelopment Sites: The City has identified proactive marketing of redevelopment and development sites as a priority and as such has developed specific opportunities to support these efforts.

The City will retain transparent communication of available sites listed with real estate developers and brokers, local businesses and other organizations. Staff will notify developers and real estate brokers of financial incentives to help market sites for potential redevelopment. Additionally, pertinent development information such as community statistics, qualitative, and quantitative data will be highlighted to inform and attract developers. A part of the City's proactive development effort will also include engaging with stakeholders potentially affected by each development / redevelopment. The City is already marketing redevelopment sites on-line with property information packages.



- I. Staff will continue to update the redevelopment sites as development occurs or priority changes, and market sites on the City's website.
- II. The City will place visual depictions of major projects within Fremont City Hall, Fremont Area District Library, schools or any combination of public places that will reach the public audience depending on the project.
- III. As projects are completed, dedication ceremonies shall be held to celebrate success. Partners at the State, local, county and sometimes necessary, federal level of government shall be invited to attend such celebratory events when federal funds are involved.
- IV. The City and its partners will display signage and promotional material of community projects. Signage for projects that utilized funds and incentives such as grants, low interest loans, tax abatements, etc. should acknowledge support of those incentive programs.

Market Analysis

The City of Fremont, Newaygo County and the other municipalities in the county collaborated on the creation of a housing market analysis. The purpose was to provide analytical results of existing housing and its market needs throughout the County, to effectively promote redevelopment sites and provide valuable information to developers. The market analysis includes details indicating sufficient support or shortfalls in the housing market demand. The City of Fremont will utilize the analytics when discussing potential redevelopments with businesses and real estate developers and how it fits with the current planning and zoning regulations for any specific site.

Community Partnerships

In order for the Strategic Marketing Plan to have the most impact, the City of Fremont will need to collaborate and actively engage with current regional partners and form new partnerships where needed. The City will continue to build relationships with community organizations, the business community from all areas of the City, business associations, local and regional schools, the Chamber of Commerce, Visitors Bureau, DDA, LDFA and others to effectively promote doing business and living in Fremont. One example is the City's active partnership with Fremont Area Public Schools (FPS). FPS helps promote city services, employee recruitment, community programming, and other special opportunities as they arise, acknowledging the mutual benefits of positive development. FPS has worked with the City on land exchanges that have led to positive City developments entailing streets, recreation and residential developments. We use each others public spaces for events, programs, and promoting events as well, which is truly a win-win.

As noted above, there is the unique partnership that exists between the City, County and other municipalities in the county, whereas we all recently came together to work with True North (NCCS) to begin tackling the issue of needed housing all throughout Newaygo County. This initiative led to the formation of a local committee charged with studying housing trends and bringing forth specific action steps to improve housing conditions in all of our communities within the County.

Conclusion

The City of Fremont's Strategic Marketing Plan provides a detailed description of the activities that will create a powerful marketing campaign for the City. The activities represent best practice recommendations based on knowledge of the market, the latest intelligence and trends in community-based marketing and professional experience, guided by insight from City staff. Activities will be prioritized according to potential impact and budget and will be updated to meet the changing needs of the City. The most significant aspect of this plan is the purposeful identification and synergy between the City and its' community members. The overall success of this Plan will rely on the implementation and tracking of activities. While implementing this plan, the City must be able to remain flexible to accommodate unforeseen changes or respond to actual marketing results. This Strategic Marketing Plan will take the City's marketing and advertising efforts to another level of professionalism and into a future that has unlimited possibilities. This plan will continue to position Fremont as "NOW AND ALWAYS -- A Fine City • A Great Community."

