

Downtown Promotion Reporter

The tools you need to bring more people and more business downtown



Targeting Groups

Attracting young professionals to urban centers

From Detroit to Denver, nonprofit groups are working to promote downtown living to a new generation of well-educated residents. Their approaches range from low-cost word-of-mouth campaigns and websites to significant financial incentives for newcomers.

In Detroit, MI (est. pop. 701,475), the Hudson Webber Foundation, along with three anchor institutions, Wayne State University, Henry Ford Health System, and the Detroit Medical Center joined forces to create the 15X15 campaign to bring 15,000 young, educated people to the downtown area by 2015. “Although sometimes referred to as a talent strategy, 15X15 is much more a place-based strategy, working in a targeted geography to make it the kind of place young talent wants to be,” says the foundation.

Among the lures are cash incentives, including a \$25,000 forgivable loan to buy a home downtown (homeowners must stay for at least five years) or \$3,500 toward a two-year lease. The program is intended to include all who bring vitality and talent to the city, but for the purposes of measuring program success, the foundation is tracking college graduates under the age of 35, as they are “more mobile, urban inclined, and entrepreneurial.” The program also seeks to promote equity, says the foundation, by, “creating employment opportunities, engaging in workforce preparation and education programs, and improving safety for existing Detroit residents.”

Since 2008, the partners have been investing in the development of their respective areas of Midtown with the needs and priorities of their target market in mind. Affordable housing, interesting employment opportunities, mass transportation, and a thriving retail scene are among the goals. And the initiative is working. In a July 2011 article, the *New York Times* refers to Detroit as “a Midwestern TriBeCa,” referring to census figures that indicate that in recent years, downtown Detroit has experienced a 59-percent increase in the number of college-educated residents under age 35, nearly 30 percent more than two-thirds of the nation’s 51 largest cities.

“Competition among city centers is heating up.”

“The city is so eager to draw educated young residents that it is offering numerous subsidies,” notes the *Times*, including employer-based incentives, start-up financing, and multiple business incubators that compliment the efforts of the 15X15 initiative. For example, the \$4 million, five-year Live Downtown initiative provides cash incentives to employees of participating companies who choose to move downtown. A combined 16,000 full- and part-time employees of the five participating companies who work in southeast Michigan are eligible to participate. Incentives include:

- A \$20,000 forgivable loan toward the purchase of a primary residence.
- A \$2,500 allowance toward apartment rental costs during year one, with an additional \$1,000 during the second year.

www.DowntownDevelopment.com

Reprinted from the December 2013 issue of *Downtown Promotion Reporter*
© 2013 Alexander Communications Group, Inc. All rights reserved.

- Existing renters received a \$1,000 allowance for renewing a lease in 2011.
- Existing homeowners receive matching funds of up to \$5,000 for exterior improvements for projects of \$10,000 or more.

Marketing matters

The Downtown Denver Partnership in Denver, CO (est. pop. 634,265), is also getting creative in its efforts to attract young professionals, according to the *Denver Business Journal*. Last fall, the organization launched a series of online articles highlighting thriving young professionals and artists and their projects in the city center. The articles, done by freelance writers and the new website, Confluence-Denver.com, were meant to help creative young professionals throughout the U.S. to see Denver's city center as a desirable place to be, says the *Journal*.

Denver already fares comparatively well with this demographic, but competition among city centers is heating up. "It will certainly be a battle for the best and brightest employees, and it will be a battle, too, to attract residents into the city," Tamara Door, the Partnership's president, tells the *Journal*. National surveys indicate that people have a favorable impression of Denver, but that it is not thought of as an urban center. And urban is key, Door says. Confluence-Denver.com is meant to help cement awareness of Denver's urban neighborhoods and attractions by generating a steady stream of lifestyle and arts stories about downtown, profiles of small entrepreneurial companies, and the activities of people creating things in and for downtown neighborhoods.

The project will be paid for by the Partnership and underwriting partners. Articles will appear in a weekly email magazine and will be pushed out through blogs and social media. The idea is that young creatives will discover Denver as they surf the web, and current metro-area

residents will become more aware of the growing vibrancy downtown.

Opportunities for education and involvement attract young professionals

And in Cleveland, OH (est. pop. 390,928), the nonprofit LiveCleveland promotes the livability of 36 neighborhoods within the city limits. According to www.hivelocitymedia.com, the group's main target audience is young professionals, who have been steadily filling up downtown apartments and condominiums to near capacity. That demand is growing, with up to 1,500 new units of housing under construction, says Jeff Kipp, executive director of Live Cleveland.

Promoting affordable, manageable living is part of the strategy, as is highlighting a multitude of educational options that may keep young professionals in the city once they decide to have families. Real success, Kipp says, will come through grassroots marketing from residents already living the experience that local organizations like LiveCleveland are trying to promote. "We need people to share their good experiences with their inner circles," he says.

Another strategy is to seat young professionals on the boards of organizations such as The Cleveland Professional 20/30 Club and Engage! Cleveland, the latter of which is a nonprofit that acts as an organizing body for the 80-plus young professional groups in town. It is hoped that greater involvement will motivate young professionals to spread the word about local job growth and vibrant cultural amenities.

Lastly, Global Cleveland is creating a comprehensive strategy that includes an online informational tool detailing the city's resources. The platform also features video interviews in multiple languages geared toward attracting young professionals, boomerangers, and international students. **DPR**

Downtown Promotion Reporter

712 Main Street — Suite 187B, Boonton, NJ 07005-1450

Telephone: (973) 265-2300 • Fax: (973) 402-6056 • Email: info@DowntownDevelopment.com • Website: www.DowntownDevelopment.com

Downtown Promotion Reporter is published monthly by Alexander Communications Group, Inc.



© 2013 Alexander Communications Group, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Alexander Communications Group.