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One Approach to Marketing Rural Communities

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CORNHUSKER ECONOMICS

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension

One Approach to Marketing Rural Communities

Declining rural populations have been making the news for decades. There is little doubt that the trend line of the most rural counties on the Great Plains has been down. But just because some rural areas are declining does not mean that all areas are declining, or are destined to decline. In fact, some rural areas are realizing that the quality of life they provide can be marketed and is an important factor for families looking to relocate from urban areas (Cantrell et al., 2008).

Marketing a community is not something that comes easy for rural residents. If you have lived in a rural location for many years it becomes difficult to visualize what it may offer a new resident, especially one that is moving from an urban to a rural area.

People looking to relocate usually find a community in two ways – through referrals from family and friends, or through a community website and other related social media (Burkhart-Kriesel et al., 2007). Unfortunately, both of these strategies can be challenging for rural communities.

Current residents often don't realize the importance of their network of family and friends as a primary conduit for new resident recruitment. They may not be able to understand what a new resident is looking for, and also what their community has to offer them.

If a potential new resident finds a community through a web search, what is posted on the Internet may not showcase images that show the quality of life in the community through its assets, opportunities and links to regional resources.

The Community Marketing Process

Is marketing a community similar to marketing a good or service in the business world? Research undertaken by

Market Report	Yr Ago	4 Wks Ago	3/8/13
<u>Livestock and Products,</u>			
<u>Weekly Average</u>			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.....	\$129.25	\$124.27	\$128.00
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.....	184.17	169.76	162.57
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.	155.93	142.93	142.09
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.	196.65	183.31	195.02
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated.	84.98	84.77	71.95
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass, 51-52% Lean.....	84.55	82.44	79.04
Slaughter Lambs, Ch. & Pr., Heavy, Wooled, South Dakota, Direct.....	145.00	107.50	105.00
National Carcass Lamb Cutout, FOB.	377.61	296.00	289.23
<u>Crops,</u>			
<u>Daily Spot Prices</u>			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W. Imperial, bu.....	6.07	7.39	6.87
Corn, No. 2, Yellow Nebraska City, bu.....	6.38	7.15	7.39
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow Nebraska City, bu.....	12.92	14.32	14.96
Grain Sorghum, No. 2, Yellow Dorchester, cwt.....	11.00	12.00	12.25
Oats, No. 2, Heavy Minneapolis, MN, bu.	3.15	4.10	4.28
<u>Feed</u>			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.	225.00	247.50	*
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.....	145.00	230.00	227.50
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good Nebraska, ton.	100.00	212.50	212.50
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture, Nebraska Average.	220.00	284.00	268.00
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture, Nebraska Average.	76.00	108.00	103.50
*No Market			

North Dakota State University, South Dakota State University and the University of Nebraska show that there are many similarities (Figure 1).

There are aspects that a community can't do a lot about when they are developing a marketing plan:

- competition from neighboring communities, regions or states;
- regulations;
- political realities;
- the age and composition of their community;
- technological changes;
- community culture based on the history of growth;
- environmental assets;
- state, national and global economy.

Even with these aspects a community can't control, there are creative ways a community can position itself to take advantage of these realities.

There are also another set of locally driven realities that communities can do something about:

- the community's vision and mission;
- the marketing goals they choose;
- the way they identify and act on their decisions;
- how they develop a "welcoming" new resident culture;
- the condition of the infrastructure;
- the visual first impression of the community.

There are always assets to build upon and opportunities which impact the community's ability to market itself. Both sets of the realities, what a community can't do much about and those aspects that they do have control over, influence the major components of a classic marketing plan.

New Resident Research - finding out who has recently arrived and what brought them here. Then stepping back, think about what skills and expertise the community needs now and in the future. Do these match up, or does the community need to reach out to one or more new groups?

Identify Target Markets - matching what the community has to offer with what certain groups want and need. Identifying the community's assets is important. (Example: if a community has an outstanding school system and available childcare, young families could be a target market.)

Also identify those aspects of the community that need to be improved, updated or removed to meet the needs and wants of the target group. There are always actions that can be undertaken to help the community become more marketable or easier to promote.

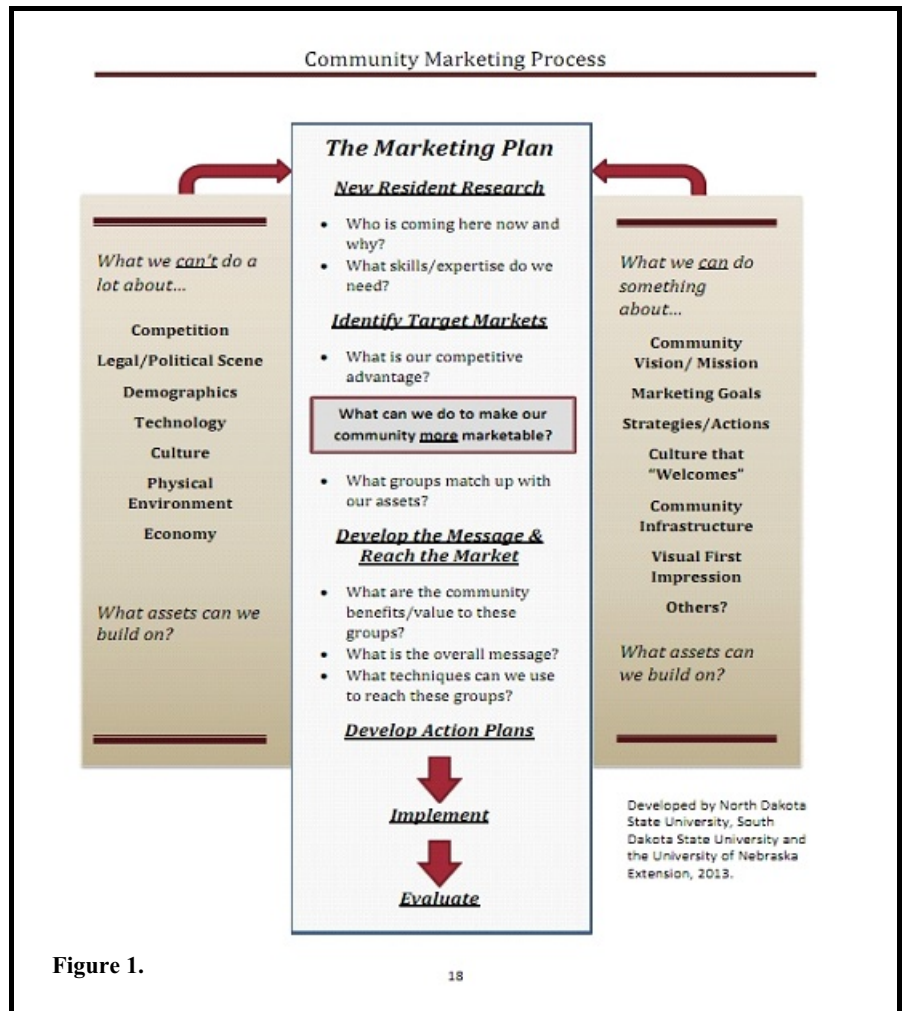


Figure 1.

Develop the Message and Reach the Market - looking at the community through the eyes of the targeted group. What does the community have to offer them? What does the community promise new residents? What are the key sound bites? Can the community incorporate them into a slogan which leads to some kind of image or graphic to help visually communicate the community's brand?

Next, think through the eyes of the target market and decide how the community is going to reach that group. Who do they talk to about relocation and where do they look for information?

Develop Action Plans ■ Implement ■ Evaluate - plan the details of who, what, when, where and how to guide the implementation of the plan. As the plan is turned into action, look back to see what worked and what could be improved in the future.

The process shown in Figure 1 is just one approach to community marketing. It takes the basic principles of business marketing and adds a new community twist to the process. It is hoped that this “new” process will be a tool to help communities develop realistic plans and achievable strategies to recruit new residents to their community.

Note: The marketing process will be showcased in a recently funded University of Nebraska Rural Futures Institute grant in communities throughout North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska in 2013 – 14. Additional information on the marketing process can be found at: <http://cari.unl.edu/communitymarketing>

References:

- Burkhart-Kriesel, C., R. Cantrell, B. Johnson, C. Narjes and R. Vogt, (2007). “Relocation to the Buffalo Commons, Newcomers to Nebraska’s Panhandle: How Do We Keep Them Here?” Center for Applied Rural Innovation Research Brief 07-003, Lincoln: University of Nebraska - Lincoln. Available at: <http://cari.unl.edu/communitymarketing/documents/HowDoWeKeepThemHere.pdf>
- Cantrell, R., C. Burkhart-Kriesel, B. Johnson, C. Narjes and R. Vogt, (2008). “Moving to the Rural Great Plains: Point of Origin Differences in the Decision Making Process.” *Great Plains Research*. 18 (2), 155-164.

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