

South Porter County, Indiana
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Destination
Development
International



Assessment Findings & Suggestions Report



Ideas to increase tourism spending

In June and in September of 2008, a Community Tourism Assessment of Southern Porter County, Indiana, was conducted, and the findings were presented in a three-hour workshop in late September. The assessment provides an unbiased overview of the community – how it is seen by a visitor. It includes a review of local marketing efforts, signage, attractions, critical mass, retail mix, ease of getting around, customer service, visitor amenities such as parking and public restrooms, overall appeal, and the community's ability to attract overnight visitors.

In performing the “Community Assessment,” we looked at the area through the eyes of a first-time visitor. No prior research was facilitated, and no community representatives were contacted except to set up the project, and the town and surrounding area were “secretly shopped.”

There are two primary elements to the assessment process: First is the “Marketing Effectiveness Assessment.”

How easy is it for potential visitors to find information about the community or area? Once they find information, are your marketing materials good enough to close the sale? In the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment, we assigned two (or more) people to plan trips into the general region. They did not know, in advance, who the assessment was for. They used whatever resources they would typically use in planning a trip: travel guides, brochures, the internet, calling visitor information centers, review of marketing materials, etc. - just as you might do in planning a trip to a “new” area or destination.

The community has five opportunities to close the sale:

- 1) Personal contact (visitor information centers, trade shows, etc.)
- 2) Websites
- 3) Brochures and printed materials
- 4) Publicity (articles)
- 5) Word of mouth - the most effective means

We tested all of these methods by contacting area visitor information services and attractions, searching the internet for activities, requesting and reviewing printed materials, looking for articles and third-party information, and questioning regional contacts. We reviewed both commercial and organizational

websites promoting the area, state tourism websites, read travel articles, and looked at AAA Tour Book reviews and suggested activities.

The marketing assessment determined how visible the community was during the research, and how effective the marketing was in convincing a potential visitor that the community would be worth a special trip, a stop, or an overnight stay. The key to the marketing assessment is to see if you have a primary lure that makes you worth a special trip of a two-hour drive - or further away. The question on most visitors' mind is: what do you have that I can't get closer to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

Where most communities fail is when they merely provide a "list" of what the community has, whether it's truly "unique" or not. Nearly every community in North America promotes the usual list of diversions: local museums, unique shops and restaurants, plenty of lodging, golf, outdoor recreation (bird watching, hiking, biking, boating, etc., etc.), historic downtowns, scenic vistas, and so on. Of course, nearly every visitor can do this closer to home. So, what makes your community worth a special trip?

Always promote your primary lure first - what makes you worth that special trip, THEN your diversionary activities. Would you go to Anaheim, California if Disneyland wasn't there? Do you think that Universal Studios and Knott's Berry Farm get upset that Disneyland gets all the glory? That they are diversions? Of course not. Eighty percent of all tourism spending is with diversionary activities. Disney does the heavy lifting in terms of advertising and promotion, and the diversionary activities ride on those coattails.

In a nutshell, the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment looks for things that make you worth a special trip and an overnight stay. The secret shoppers look for details, details, details. To be successful you must provide itineraries and specifics - not just generalities. Are your marketing efforts good enough to close the sale?

The second part of the assessment process is the On-site Assessment. During this part of the assessment, we spent several days in the community, looking at enticement from freeways and highways (signs, billboards, something that would get a visitor to stop), beautification and overall curb appeal, way-finding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public restrooms, visitor

information, parking), activities, overall appeal, retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass, customer service, area attractions, pedestrian friendliness, gathering spaces, evening activities, and the availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The community benefits from tourism when visitors spend money, and they do that in the local gift shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. Therefore, the On-site Assessment includes a candid look at private businesses as much as public spaces and amenities.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we provide a low-cost "suggestion," where possible, on how the challenge can be corrected or overcome. The suggestions are not termed "recommendations," as they were developed without consulting the community first about possible restraints, future plans, or reasons the suggestions may not be appropriate. Hopefully this assessment process will open dialogue within the community, leading it to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

It's important to note that to increase the community's tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions may have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all, can have a profoundly successful impact on the community's ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be a community-wide effort, involving both privately owned businesses as well as local, county, and state agencies, where appropriate. Every local organization plays a role in tourism, downtown revitalization, or economic development efforts. A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO, CVB, Chamber, TPA, etc.) cannot be successful if the tourism effort is not community-wide.

In many cases, issues may come up that you are already aware of and are already working on. In that case, the assessment validates those efforts. But more often than not, the assessment will point out things that you are painfully aware of but can't mention or bring up without paying a political price. Local politics can be a killer of the tourism industry.

While marketing efforts are important, product development is the most important factor of a successful tourism industry. Visitors want activities, not just things to look at. How much time can a visitor spend enjoying activities - that cater to their interests - in your community? Does your community have truly unique attractions the visitor can't get closer to home? You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises - otherwise visitors might come once, but they won't come back. It's much more cost effective to bring people back, than to always go out and entice new visitors into town. "Been there, done that" communities eventually run out of visitors and find they don't have a sustainable tourism industry, or simply become pit stops or gateways on the way to somewhere else.

After spending several days reviewing marketing materials and assessing the community, we have looked at all of these issues, developed some suggestions and ideas the community can discuss and possibly implement to help increase tourism spending locally.

SUCCESSFUL TOURISM TRANSLATES TO CASH

Tourism is successful when the community imports more cash than it exports. When residents spend their hard-earned money outside the community, the community is exporting cash - often referred to as "leakage." Tourism helps fill that gap, importing cash into the local economy without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services. Visitors come, spend money, then go home. When you import more cash than you export, you have a positive "balance of trade." Communities with successful tourism programs easily see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas other communities find that they subsidize visitors - providing services visitors use without them leaving enough money behind to cover the cost of those services.

The primary goal of the tourism industry is to bring more cash into the local economy. This doesn't happen when visitors come into the community, get out of their cars, and take photographs. And it doesn't happen when visitors go swimming in the lake at your city park all day, sunning, and eating the lunch they brought from home. And it doesn't happen when visitors hike down your trails, enjoy your interpretive centers, or stroll through your lovely arboretums. These are all great things to do, and, of course, you do want your visitors to do these - but, you also want to entice them into your shops,

your cafes, espresso stands, restaurants, galleries, B&B's, hotels, ultimately opening their wallets to make purchases. That is what helps your local economy, your small merchants, your hoteliers, and your tax coffers.

To entice visitors to spend money in your community, you need to have places for them to spend it - you need to have the right mix of shops, restaurants, entertainment, and lodging facilities, all in an attractive setting, as well as the attractions that make them want to visit you in the first place.

THE THREE TYPES OF TOURISM

1. Visiting friends and family

The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and/or family. If you did nothing to promote tourism, you would still have tourism in your community. However, when friends and family come to visit, do local residents take them out to eat, shop, dine locally? Or do they head to a neighboring community? Do your locals even know what you have to offer? An effective tourism marketing effort also includes educating locals as to what you have and how to find it through effective wayfinding signage, gateways and advertising.

2. Business travel

The second most popular reason for travel is business. Included in this category is educational travel: colleges and universities, as well as conventions and meetings, corporate travel, vendor travel, etc. Like leisure travelers, this group is looking for things to do "after hours" while in the area. The most successful convention and trade show towns are the result of their secondary activities or "diversions," not simply because of their convention and exhibition facilities. Think DisneyWorld, Disneyland, San Antonio's River Walk, to name a few.

3. Leisure travel

The third, and most lucrative of all types of visitors, is the leisure traveler. They have no personal connections to the community, but are coming purely to enjoy themselves. They stay in commercial lodging establishments, eat virtually all their meals in local restaurants, and their top diversionary activity is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting.

The average leisure visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet typically only spends four to six hours with the primary lure. They then spend eight to ten hours with diversionary activities - things they could do closer to home, but will do while in the area. A good example of this is Branson, Missouri, the “live music-theater capital of the world.” This town of 6,500 residents hosts 7.5 million visitors a year. The primary “lure” is the 49 music theaters. The average visitor attends two shows a day over about four hours. During the other hours of the day, the visitor will shop in local outlet malls, head to the water parks, theme parks, and other attractions, play a round of golf, hike, bike, fish, do some bird watching, and participate in any number of other activities they could do closer to home, but will do while visiting Branson.

THE THREE STAGES OF TOURISM

1. Status quo

If you take no action to develop the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, simply because some travelers will pull off local highways or freeways for gas, food, or lodging, as well as the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have some tourism.

2. Getting people to stop

The first priority of developing a successful tourism industry is getting people to stop. Imagine how successful businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community – buying gas, an ice cream cone, a sandwich, a gift or souvenir?

If there's a strong pull, imagine the money spent if visitors stayed two hours in the community, which nearly always translates to additional spending.

The first goal is to get those travelers to stop.



3. Becoming the destination

To become a destination community you must have attractions and supporting amenities that convince visitors to spend the night. And those attractions must be different from what the visitor can get closer to home.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors using your community as a pit stop on the way to somewhere else.

THE FOUR-TIMES RULE

Visitors will make a point of stopping or staying in a community if it has enough activities that appeal specifically to them and will keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes) If a visitor has to drive an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

The more you have to offer, collectively, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay, and of course, the more they will spend. This is why it is so important for communities to market more than just their immediate geographic areas. By marketing neighboring activities and attractions, you present much more for a visitor to do, and you make the visit worth the trip. Visitors don't care about city limits or county lines – so market the broader package and you'll be able to keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some more shopping, and hopefully, an overnight stay.

SELL THE EXPERIENCE, NOT GEOGRAPHY

Nearly every destination marketing organization is charged with promoting a geographic area, yet visitors couldn't care less about those boundaries. They are looking for activities that cater to their interests, and location is second to the experience. ALWAYS promote the primary lure first, then the location. If I want to go see Andy Williams, I don't care whether he's in Muskogee, Oklahoma or in Branson, Missouri. Visitors, by the millions, head to Disneyland, DisneyWorld, Dollywood and other attractions. They are not going to Anaheim, Orlando or Pigeon Forge.

Always sell the activity - the experience - THEN the location.



LURES, DIVERSIONS AND AMBIANCE

Too often communities promote the list of diversions that nearly every community has. The primary lure is the activity that a visitor can't find closer to home.

Always promote your primary lure, then the diversions. Do not try to be all things to all people. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had "something for everyone?" Of course not - you go there because they have something specific for you. Find your niche and promote it like crazy.

Historic downtowns provide ambiance - they are not attractions, diversions, nor are they a primary lure. It's what's in the buildings that makes a downtown a destination.

The same can be said for scenery. Unless your vista is a world-class scene, such as Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon, scenic vistas create wonderful ambiance, but don't translate to spending, and they only last a few minutes. Then what?

All too often communities promote their heritage as a primary draw. How far would you travel to visit a mining museum? A timber museum? An agricultural center? A county historical museum? Heritage must be outstanding and pervasive throughout the community to be a primary lure, such as Plimoth Plantation or Salem, Massachusetts.



Thousands of communities are the "capital" of something. For instance, in California, Borrego Springs is the grapefruit capital of the world. Gilroy is the garlic capital. Modesto is the tomato capital. Gridley is the kiwi capital. Oxnard is the strawberry capital. Fallbrook is the avocado

capital. But here's the question: Have you ever gone anywhere because it was the capital of a fruit or a vegetable?

Your local heritage is important to the community and can set the ambiance, even becoming a diversionary activity. But to the vast majority of potential visitors, it's not a reason to make a special trip.

BE DIFFERENT OR THE BEST

Why should a visitor come to your community if they can enjoy the same activities closer to home? Too many communities promote "outdoor recreation" as their primary draw. Unfortunately, that is the same attraction promoted by nearly every community in North America.

If you are different, then you have a reason for travelers to choose to visit you. If you are the best, then visitors will generally flock to your doors.

If you have great hiking trails, then market their unique qualities. Be specific and paint the image of how wonderful they are in the minds of your potential visitors. If you have one fantastic restaurant in town, let people know about it – a unique dining experience is something many people will travel far to enjoy.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, began its Shakespeare Festival, which now runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. The Shakespeare Festival made Ashland different from any other community.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and produces dozens of Bavarian events every year. Some now say the town looks more genuinely Bavarian than towns in Bavaria. It is now one of the primary tourist destinations in Washington state, hosting more than 2.5 million visitors annually. They offer a different experience, an experience that is pervasive throughout town.

Okanogan County, Washington is an outdoor recreational paradise – just like 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guidebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising

efforts. Like, "Pinch yourself, you're in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent." This, and other quotes like it, make it worth the drive to visit Okanogan Country. The third-party endorsements show that they are the best.

Set yourself apart from everyone else, and you'll see that in being unique, you'll become a greater attraction.

CRITICAL MASS MEANS CASH

Although it may not be the primary reason why visitors come to your community, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity of visitors. Besides lodging, it is also how visitors spend the most amount of money.

Do you have a pedestrian-friendly shopping district? If not, can you create one? Many communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian "village" including visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information, restrooms, etc., all in an attractive, landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb in those two or three blocks (not spread out all over town) is 10+10+10: Ten destination retail shops, which includes galleries, antiques, collectibles, home accents and furnishings, artists in action, book stores, logo gear (clothing), souvenirs, outfitters, tour operators, activity shops such as kites, jewelry, wine or tobacco shops, and other specialties. The second ten is for food: ice cream, fudge and candy stores, soda fountains, sit-down dining, coffee shops, cafes, bistros, delis, etc. And the final ten are businesses open after 6:00 pm. This includes entertainment: bars, dance clubs, theaters (movies and performing), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop), etc.

The important point is to group these businesses together to create the "critical mass" in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will attract visitors as well as locals, and make it worth their while to stop and shop. People are always drawn to the critical mass – the opportunity to have multiple choices, multiple experiences, all in a convenient and attractive setting.

TOURISM IS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The goal of successful tourism is for people to come into the community, spend money, and go home. Tourism is nearly a \$650 billion dollar industry in the U.S., supporting millions of jobs. Ninety percent of tourism industry

businesses are small businesses of which 90% have less than 15 employees. Tourism provides the opportunity for entrepreneurs to get started, for small family-run businesses to thrive, for artisans and craftspeople to find a market, and creates a basis for unique niche-retail environment including wineries, artists, crafts, etc. Tourism provides a diverse market within the community, expanding its potential. Enhancing the community through beautification efforts creates an attractive setting for both locals and visitors, key in revitalizing a community's downtown. And a tourism-friendly town will attract non-tourism industries faster than others – new businesses will see the community as a visitor before they make a final determination about the community. Tourism is the front door to your economic development efforts.

The benefits of a healthy tourism industry can rejuvenate a town, foster community pride, encourage economic diversity, and lead the way to a vital, successful community.

NEXT STEPS

The findings and suggestions in this report can provide your community with many ideas, strategies, and goals to reach for. We hope that it fosters dialogue in the community and becomes a springboard for the community in enhancing its tourism industry, leading to greater prosperity, rejuvenation, and enjoyment by all the citizens.

This report offers a first step in reaching that goal. To fully realize the benefits of this assessment, the community should take these findings and suggestions, discuss them and evaluate them, and develop a plan for implementation.

A detailed "Community Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan" builds on the results of this assessment, adding in-depth research, evaluation, and community input to develop a unique brand and implementation program. The assessment process essentially provides a look at where you are today.

The next steps in the planning process is interviewing local stakeholders, providing public outreach, and reviewing past and current planning efforts. This determines where you want to go as a community.

The third step involves research, feasibility and market analysis, and determining your brand - what you are or hope to be known for.

Then comes the "development" portion of the plan or the "how to get there" program: determining what product development initiatives need to be undertaken to reinforce and grow the brand. This also includes defining the roles of the various local organizations. Brand-building takes a village - everyone pulling in the same direction, each with its own "to do list."

Finally, there's the detailed marketing plan: how and when you will tell the world who you are and what makes you special: the place to live, work and play.

This Branding, Development & Marketing Plan should be an "action plan" as opposed to a "strategic plan." You want a to do list, by organization, not just general strategies, goals and objectives.

For every recommendation the following elements should be detailed:

1. A brief description of the recommendation
2. Who would be charged with implementation
3. When it would be implemented
4. How much it will cost
5. Where the money will come from
6. The rationale for making the recommendation

The recommendations should provide all the necessary steps for your community to be successful in attaining its goals of a more diverse economy with an enhanced tourism industry and to become a more attractive and enjoyable community for both visitors and citizens.

If you move forward with the development of the Action Plan and hire outside services, always hire the most qualified team you can find (issue a request for Statement of Qualifications) and then negotiate the scope of work and cost with them. If you are not able to reach an agreement, then move to number two on your list. A good plan will provide a program to get local residents and the business community pulling together to enhance the community, building its unique image in the minds of visitors and residents alike. The result of your efforts will be a prosperous, enjoyable environment to live, work, and visit.

Quick Facts:

- Tourism is an economic development activity.
- 90% of tourism industry businesses are comprised of 15 employees or less. It is the number one business in the country for small businesses.
- 83% of tourism spending is by visitors with annual household incomes of \$70,000 plus. Who are you attracting?
- Tourism is an \$11 billion industry in Indiana.
 - \$1.4 billion: lodging
 - \$2.4 billion: restaurants
 - \$6.6 billion: shopping, entertainment, transportation.
- Tourism accounts for nearly 260,000 jobs and \$6.8 billion in wages in the state.
- A tourism-friendly city will spawn non-tourism industries faster.
- Geography-based tourism is dead.
- Experience-based tourism is alive and is the future of tourism - starting yesterday.
- Visitors don't care about counties or districts, cities, towns and "places." They are looking for "activities" first, THEN the location.
- The days of marketing lists are over.
- The heart and soul of any community, besides its people, is its downtown. Its health is the litmus test for all your economic development efforts.

Real Men Don't Ask For Directions

The rule of wayfinding:

There are two primary signage issues that are critical to the success of any community: gateways and directional (or wayfinding) signage. Gateways introduce visitors to the community and downtown districts and provide a sense of arrival.

Directional signs help visitors (and residents) navigate the area, telling them what attractions and amenities are available and where to find them. If visitors can't find what they are looking for, they'll simply head down the road.

The photos on this page show several excellent examples of community wayfinding signs. They are decorative to enhance the theme or brand of the community and easy to read and follow. Note that there should be no more than five items on a wayfinding sign.

Leavenworth, Washington (top right), Washington's Bavarian Village.



Appleton, Wisconsin (bottom left and center); and Modesto, California (bottom right).

Your wayfinding system should be decorative, should never include more than five items on any one sign, and should be easy to read from a distance.

This page shows some additional examples of effective community wayfinding signage:

- The Woodlands, Texas (top right).
- Kalamazoo, Michigan (bottom left). This is an excellent pedestrian wayfinding map, which ties in with the city's overall wayfinding system. They include pedestrian wayfinding signs as well as signs for drivers.
- Covington, Kentucky (bottom right).



Suggestion:

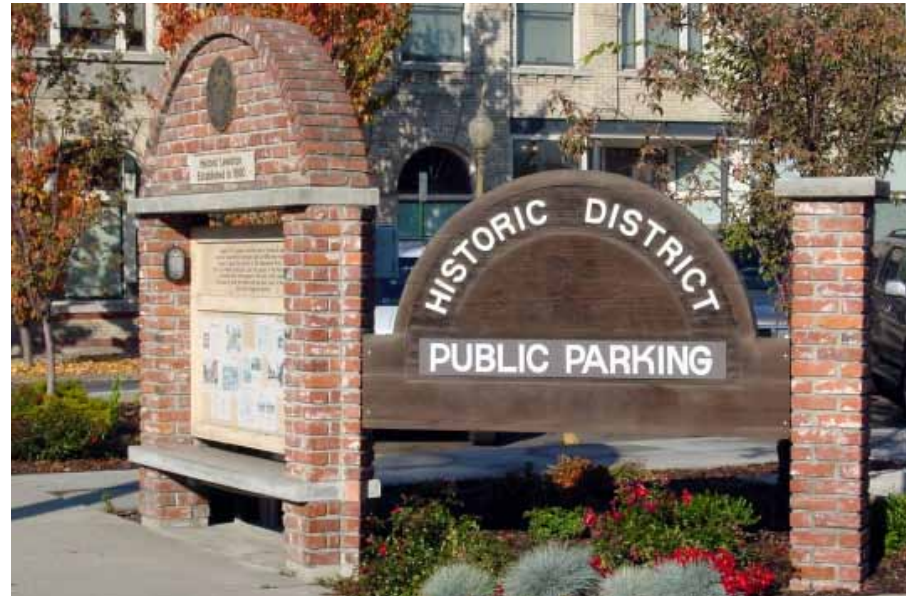
Every community (or the county) should develop and implement a signage plan and program which will address:

- Wayfinding
- Gateways and entries
- Attractions
- Amenities
- Billboards and marketing displays
- Pole banners
- Visitor information kiosks

Less than 5% of visitors stop at visitor information centers - IF they can find that! That makes good wayfinding signage especially important, by letting visitors easily see what you have to offer, and helping them find it.

Valparaiso: The City of Contrasts. I guess I'm finally here (bottom left). Which exit is the best one to take? Suggestion: Add a snipe banner to the sign that states "Downtown - Next exit" (or whichever is the best exit to take).

We saw this one (bottom right), and we're not sure if we're headed the right direction. Where will this take us and what is "Ivy Tech"? Let travelers know which exit will direct visitors downtown into your spending districts.



We're trying to find the Hampton Inn, but the navigation system brought us here as 1451 Silhavy (top right). This doesn't look like a Hampton Inn?? When asking later, we learned many other travelers have had the same problem.

Connect the dots using a wayfinding signage system, and make sure addresses are accurate and complete to assure there are no problems with navigation systems.

They rolled out the red carpet (bottom left). Lost and confused, Monica parked here to gather her thoughts, map in hand. A gentleman came running out of this building, yelling at her to move her car immediately. She told him she was lost and asked if he could help, and she was told me that if she didn't leave immediately his boss would have to call the police! Welcome to Valparaiso! Little did Monica know that this would be a harbinger of things to come! ...

Once we got into town (bottom right) we found better wayfinding signage. Nice job. These are easy to read and decorative.



Suggestion: Avoid redundancy in signage (top right). Suggestion: Remove the hospital and library signs. They serve no purpose and just create sign clutter.

Rules of wayfinding signage:

- Never more than five lines on a sign.
- Lettering should be one inch for every twelve feet of viewing distance.

With no gateway sign here (bottom left), there's no sense of arrival. There's nothing that compels us to pull off the highway.

The chain link framework here (bottom right) with community service organization signs gives a cluttered second-class appearance. Suggestion: Post your service organization signs on a decorative monument base, in a location where visitors can stop and read them, providing a much improved first impression of the community.

Suggestion: Remove this structure as soon as possible. It hurts more than it helps.



First Impressions Are Lasting Impressions - Gateways

The rule of perceived value:

Attractive gateway signs create a sense of arrival - they create a sense of place. But gateway signs should always be placed where they will give the first, best impression, which is not necessarily at your city limits.

The town of Oroville, Washington, (bottom left) placed these very attractive monument signs at each end of their three-block long shopping district. They increase the perceived value of the downtown, slowing traffic and getting people to take a second look; they make a statement that this downtown is a great place to be.

The Valparaiso Department of Water Works at Flint Lake (bottom right) is a great monument sign, and could be a good example for gateway signs for downtown Valparaiso. The question is: Why was so much money spent here, out in the middle of nowhere, yet there is nothing on the highway?



We assumed this was public parking (top right) ... but there were no signs stating so. Providing easy access to parking and making it easy to find and available for a minimum of four hours is critical to promoting spending downtown.

Beautiful, clean boulevards, nice pole banners and great light poles (bottom left). This creates a very good first impression. The brick posts and wrought iron fencing (top right) are very nicely done. This looks like a first class destination ...

... or is it? (bottom right)

Don't allow outdoor retail to begin making the town look like a second hand "garage sale" town. There's a huge difference between outdoor displays and outdoor retail. Outdoor displays should be decorative, as if they are an extension of window displays. They should enhance the ambiance of the town and help pull customers into the store.

Suggestion for Vintage Home and Garden: Paint the building red. Paint the framework around the doors and windows. Pull the weeds growing between the parking lot and sidewalk. Add some planters and hanging baskets. Create displays outside as if they were window displays. Get rid of the round chair sign as it does nothing to pull customers in.



First Impressions Are Lasting Impressions - Businesses

The rule of perceived value:

Curb appeal can account for 70% of sales at restaurants, wineries, lodging, retail shops, golf courses. Would you eat at the restaurant in the top right photo? Probably not - your first impression might be shock that this place sells food at all. And yet, it's one of the most famous barbecues in Texas, drawing tour bus loads of visitors. It's an example of a restaurant that is so different that it is a unique experience, which attracts people - even though it breaks the rules of beautification.

A research study had four towns plant street trees every 30 feet along one block (bottom left) and then surveyed sales in that block for a year, comparing them to sales in the rest of the town. The results found that sales in the block with the street trees increased 18% - three to four times that of the rest of town.

Align yourselves with Keep America Beautiful, Inc. - the nation's largest community improvement network www.kab.org. They are a national non-profit with state affiliated offices and can help with trash pickup, curb appeal, signage and other beautification efforts and projects.



These are very attractive streetscapes and obviously a good deal of money was spent to enhance the downtown. But looking at the pictures, what's missing from this beautiful stage? The actors! Downtown beautification creates an outstanding stage, or theater, but without something happening on stage, would you head to the theater no matter how beautiful it might be?

These photos were shot at 11 AM on a beautiful morning in early June, temperature about 80 degrees. These streets should be filled with shoppers and people doing errands, having coffee with friends or even just reading the paper. Remember that people want to be where other people are hanging out and energy builds as people congregate (think about the mall!).

Bring downtown to life!

- Street vendors: a newspaper stand, florist
- Outdoor dining and internet cafes
- Coffee shops
- Weekend artisans in action, musicians

Other notes:

- Always have benches face sidewalk traffic. Place them against buildings whenever possible, looking out.

- What's in these shops (far bottom right)? Install "blade" or perpendicular signage.

- Add beautification: pots, planters, benches to soften the transition between storefronts and the sidewalks.

What a great opportunity to make downtown both a local as well as a regional destination.



Downtown appears as if an epidemic has broken out (top right)! It's empty of people. All dressed up and nowhere to go. The potted plants (near right) are very nice.

All the beautification and hardscapes are important, but are only one element of a successful downtown. The other half is recruiting the right mix of businesses, after you determine what you want downtown to be: its brand. Entertainment? Dining? Shopping? Art? Antiques? Nightlife? Suggestion: Develop a branding focus for downtown, then recruit the businesses that will fulfill the direction.

Suggestion: Regulate the use of plastic banners (bottom photos).

- 1) Only two weeks, six times per year max per business.
- 2) Special promotions and events only.
- 3) By permit only.
- 4) Improper use can result in impounding or fines per day.

These signs make it seem that downtown is a ghost town in the making.



Too many of these “For Lease” signs and business “For Sale” signs (top right and bottom left), and it suggests that this is town headed in the wrong direction. If possible, take down the business for sale signs, and advertise the business for sale in publications instead or use smaller signs.

Great work on adding bulb-outs (bottom right two photos) and widening sidewalks! We came back in September to find a beautifully developed downtown streetscape. Now comes the hard part: getting the right business mix downtown that will make it a hub of activity.

This should go (bottom left photo). Is Ward’s Cafe open or for sale? Where is the Gourmet Express? Is that the same business as Ward’s Cafe or another business? Suggestion: Replace this mess with one professionally produced sign that will help increase business.



Don't miss the obvious upkeep (top) while building and constructing the new streetscape.
Suggestion: Replace dead plants, keep planters weeded, etc. Consider painting the planters to reduce the concrete look downtown.

This shop (bottom left) needs a lot of help: Suggestions: New paint, new updated signage, blade signs, window trim painted, beautification added, removal of all the fliers and notes from the windows, etc. Raise the bar for your shop - you'll attract more customers with a tidy, fresh, attractive storefront. Especially for a gift shop. Don't look like a second hand store.

Curb appeal is an investment with tremendous return, and it starts with the merchants. Downtown property owners and merchants need to take the lead and have the most to gain.

Fredericksburg, Texas (bottom right) is the most visited small town in Texas (population 12,000 - and hosting two million visitors annually.) People drive from hours away to spend their day in this charming town. The potted shrubs, flowers, benches, covered sidewalks and signage all create an atmosphere that makes people want to linger. The merchants do this work, not the city. Suggestions: Create a buying co-op for planters, benches, topsoil and plantings. Bring in local garden clubs to help with the effort.



Note the beautiful outdoor displays these merchants create to help pull customers into their stores. The two right photos were taken in Fredericksburg, Texas.

The photo, below, is from Jonesborough, Tennessee. These outdoor displays - the potted shrubs, flowers, benches, pumpkins, decorative signage, and other decorative elements - invite shoppers into the stores, increase the perceived value, and make it clear that the shops are open for business.

For just a couple of hundred dollars, this effort can bring a tremendous return on the investment.

Pull customers into your shops, restaurants, and lodging facilities by creating beautiful entrances. We all “judge a book by its cover.” You can use ever-green shrubs which will save on costs and will create nice curb appeal year round.



This streetscape in Ellicottville, New York (top right) helps make this one of the most popular small towns in western New York state. The window boxes and baskets of flowers, the perpendicular signage and decorative A-board signs, the decorative shop facades, the tables and chairs, create a wonderful ambiance.

The merchant (below left) in Dubois, PA does a good job pulling customers into the shop with this decorative outdoor display. Rather than using pots of flowers and shrubs, the merchant has used select merchandise artfully arranged, extending window displays to exterior spaces.

This merchant in Grass Valley, California (bottom right) invests about 15 minutes each morning to set up this beautiful outdoor display, and says it is well worth the effort for the number of customers it pulls into the shop. The flowers are silk.

It's important to note that women account for nearly 80% of all spending and they, more than men, are attracted to inviting retailers. None of the displays shown on this page are expensive or that time consuming.



Suggestion: Build a cedar fence to screen the garbage cans (top right). Keep it clean, picking up the trash each morning or evening. These were readily in view walking downtown. What is your first impression?

Great use of classy blade signs! (bottom right) These make it very easy for both drivers and pedestrians to see what is in the buildings. We'll use these as an example all over the country!

Soften the transition between the brick facades and the sidewalks (bottom right) by adding some potted trees and shrubs against the buildings.

These ill-kept gardens are directly in front of City Hall, and don't project the positive, upbeat sense of downtown. Perhaps this would be a grand garden club project, given its location? The city should always set the standard and raise the bar. Suggestion: Would a local garden club or Master Gardeners adopt this area for the city? Make it a showcase.



20/20 Signage Equals \$\$\$

The rules of retail signage:

As visitors drive into town, they look directly forward through the windshield to make sure they don't violate local traffic laws or cause an accident. They might be on the lookout for a parking place, a public restroom, or a place to stop and have lunch. It's very difficult for drivers to get detailed views of the buildings looking side to side when they need to keep their eyes forward.

And yet, many shops in a downtown district place their signs flat against the building, on the doors, or on the windows. It's easy for drivers to miss those signs, missing the shops entirely.

The solution? Use perpendicular blade signs, which allow drivers to read them without turning their heads. Make sure the letters are tall enough to be seen from a distance, and are consistent in height and size.

These examples are from Leavenworth, WA (top); Carmel, CA (bottom right); and Nantucket, MA (bottom left.)



Can you tell what's in any of these shops? (top and bottom right photos)
Use blade signs to help people see what's in these buildings. Suggestion: A merchant-driven retail signage program can help address these signage issues by creating a "jury of peers" to develop effective and decorative sign standards, and perhaps a buying co-op to help make the purchase of signs more affordable.

Suggestion: Move the newspaper box (bottom left) or replace it and clean up the planters. Add landscape enhancements at the facades.

Wide, clean sidewalks (bottom right, left)---great job!

While the merchant (top right) has added a hanging fern and one pot, potted plants should be grouped in threes and should be placed every three feet if not closer. The more you have, the stronger the pull.

Suggestion: Work to keep live plant materials in your planters (top right and bottom left). These planters would be ideal for street trees.

Overall, the ambiance is very good but the need for "softscapes" is needed throughout downtown. Softscapes can make a "place" a "destination."



Soften the front of these shops with potted shrubs and flowers, as well as some benches, and draw us inside (top right). You would never know what's in these shops unless you stand in the street or are across the street. Once again, there's a need for perpendicular signage.

Neenah, Wisconsin (population 5,000) did a downtown makeover. Notice the photo (bottom left) with the typical building facades meeting the sidewalks. Now look at the shops (bottom right), just one block down. Which set of shops would get your attention? After the beautification enhancements in this block, retail sales increased nearly three times faster than in the rest of the town.

Make creating "softscapes" a major priority. The business community should take the lead on this effort. Not the city. Soften the transition from building facades to concrete sidewalks. Make it stunningly beautiful. Pull people in. People are drawn to beautiful spaces.



Create Merchant Driven Signage & Outdoor Display Programs

The rule of pulling customers in:

Always promote what it is you're selling - the lure to bring customers in *before* you promote the name of the business. Do you know what "Laffin Crab" is? (bottom left) A seafood restaurant? Crab house? They are no longer in business because they sold kites and windsocks, but people couldn't tell what they sold, so they didn't bother going into the shop.

Let people know what you're selling - that's a much more powerful lure than the name of your business, no matter how creative get with your name.

The Hidden Garden (bottom right) could benefit from extending its window displays outside. Show what you're selling with a decorative display. If this is a gardening shop or florist it, of all businesses, should set the standard for downtown beautification. Once again, this is a nice clean streetscape, but is missing the ambiance that can make this block a stunning place to spend time AND money.



A GREAT example of giving people an experience and pulling them in! (top right) Excellent signage selling the “experience.”

Recruit a gardening club or similar organization to take responsibility for caring for your “Crown Jewels” (bottom left).

In Sisters, Oregon (bottom right), the local garden club has been very involved in the beautification of their town. With hanging baskets and planters filled with flowers and shrubs, lots of trees, seating and gathering areas, small fountains, and other beautification, it's a real pleasure to simply walk down the street in Sisters. As a result, Sisters now boasts the highest per capita retail sales of any city in Oregon. Not bad for a town of 1,100 residents.



These buildings (all photos this page) are beautiful, and there must be stories to tell about them. There wasn't even signage at the courthouse (bottom right) telling us what it is.

Find ways to tell visitors the stories about these buildings with displays or exhibits. People love stories, and stories help make an emotional connection between visitors and the place they are visiting. Stories can bring a building to life in people's minds, giving them a reason to stay longer, which will result in more spending. Who built these buildings? For what purpose? Have they remained in this condition over the years or have they needed renovation? Placards and interpretive signs help bring these to life.



Promote Your Anchor Tenants

An absolute Valparaiso gem--and pacesetter (top right)! Colorful plantings, a cool place to sit, a beautiful facade and nice window displays all add to its charm.

Market your specific attractions - the BEST that you have to offer in food, shops and activities. Too often, communities market the same thing everyone else has: outdoor recreation, shopping, dining, historic downtown, hiking, biking, "we have it all," etc. But why should I go out of my way to come to your attractions, if I can find the same thing closer to home? That's why it's so important to market specifics, not generalities.

Create an Activities Guide (bottom photos) that highlights specific shops, attractions and restaurants that are unique. This one, produced by the Ottawa, Illinois Visitor Center, is proving very successful.

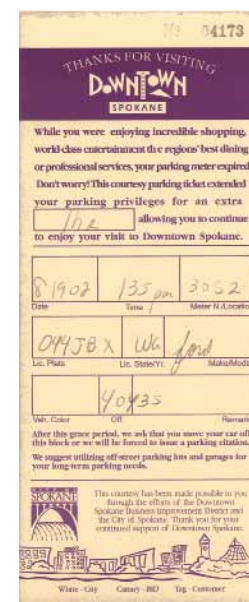


Downtown parking is not clearly marked at all. Suggestion: Use clear signage on the main street to direct traffic to these side streets where they can find parking (bottom right, top near right). After some searching we found the parking, but it's off the beaten path, and not easy to find. Wayfinding signage to help visitors find public parking is essential.

The general rule for visitors in a downtown shopping, dining and entertainment district: four hours. It typically takes visitors about four hours to do all the shopping and dining they want to do in a downtown. Create incentives to pull people downtown. Provide plenty of parking spaces that are easy to find, well-marked, with rates that are reasonable and easy to understand.

When visitors to Spokane, Washington's downtown shopping district overstay their parking limit, instead of handing out a regular ticket, the city issues these "tickets." (top far right) These tickets give the visitor an hour grace period - thus fostering goodwill.

Suggestion: Don't forget the details - this garbage can (bottom left) should be repainted or replaced.



Details that would improve this shop (top right) include cleaning up or repainting the door and removing the paper signs. Add a blade sign. Overall, this shop is better than most.

“Details” include the people who interface with the visitor (bottom left). When asking for help at the Chamber office, it was clear Monica was putting the woman behind the desk out. She handed me this information (bottom right) on a sticky note, which I had no clue as to its meaning. This turned out to be one of the rudest encounters with a “professional” front-line employee in our 25 years in the industry. Very sad. People like this should not be placed front and center where there may be times you interface with the public, or visitors looking to spend time and money in the community.

This unfriendliness or attitude was repeated at several stops downtown, including two restaurants, a coffee shop and a clothing retailer. Suggestion: Customer service training of your “front line” employees would be helpful so them to understand how important their roles are to your visitors.



Now THIS is attention to the details! (top right) Nice job and a beautiful streetscape.

Looks like an interesting place (bottom left), but we only discovered it on our way out of town. How and where could we learn more? Where can we get tickets?

We did - two days later at the CVB in Chesterton! Make it easy for people to find out more information. Suggestion: Can you place ads in the downtown restaurants or coffee houses, and if you already are, are they being prominently displayed? This is a great community resource that shouldn't be undersold.

Are the chain link fences necessary (bottom right)? Suggestion: Replace them with wrought iron, which is much more attractive and doesn't have the same "prison" look as chain link provides.



The photos (top right and bottom left) are some excellent examples of attractive, but simple, wrought iron fences. Consider using wrought iron instead of chain link.

The Expo Center (bottom right) is a beautiful facility and appears to be a great community asset. How and when is it being used? Suggestion: Add a reader board of upcoming events. Invite us back! “Coming this summer” and then list the events, dates and a website address to get more information.



Valparaiso University has a beautiful campus and is another great community (if not regional) asset. Suggestion: Could a map be made to showcase the campus along with a walking tour map?

There should be three or four visitor information kiosks around the campus that provide information about the university as well as cross-selling things to see and do in the community.

How integrated is the school with the community? Be certain to take steps to keep these well educated graduates in town to help build and maintain a vibrant, healthy economy. Give them internship experiences, invite them to have representation in community groups and give them seats on important decision-making public commissions to gain their input on building the community for the future.



Kiosks Never Sleep

The 24/7 rule:

Visitors don't just travel during business hours, so make sure your visitor information is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Put up visitor information kiosks and outdoor brochure holders at local attractions, parking areas, and visitor amenities. If you place them in locations where visitors can also spend money, you'll receive a double benefit. Place them at or near your restroom facilities.

Ashland, Oregon, home of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, provides an excellent visitor information display (top right) with a map, lodging and restaurant facilities, and attractions information.

This kiosk (bottom left), also in Ashland, can be manned with a representative, or closed up, but still offers brochures from weather-proof holders around the clock. Whistler, BC (bottom right) has several visitor information displays around the popular village. Make sure yours include brochures.



Visitor information kiosks and displays can be built to represent and enhance the architecture and theme of the community.

This example (top right), in Kingsport, Tennessee, is constructed in brick to complement the historic downtown. They included 24-hour brochure distribution (bottom left) as well. Merchants and attractions pay \$5 monthly to have their brochures included, which helps pay for stocking and maintenance, plus provides additional funds to help finance construction of additional kiosks.

Another fun style of visitor information kiosk is shown here (bottom right). This one is located in Greenville, South Carolina.



Right outside the doors to the Asheville, North Carolina visitor information center, they've added this attractive display with brochure distribution. The shelving unit to the left is where full-sized visitor guides are placed.

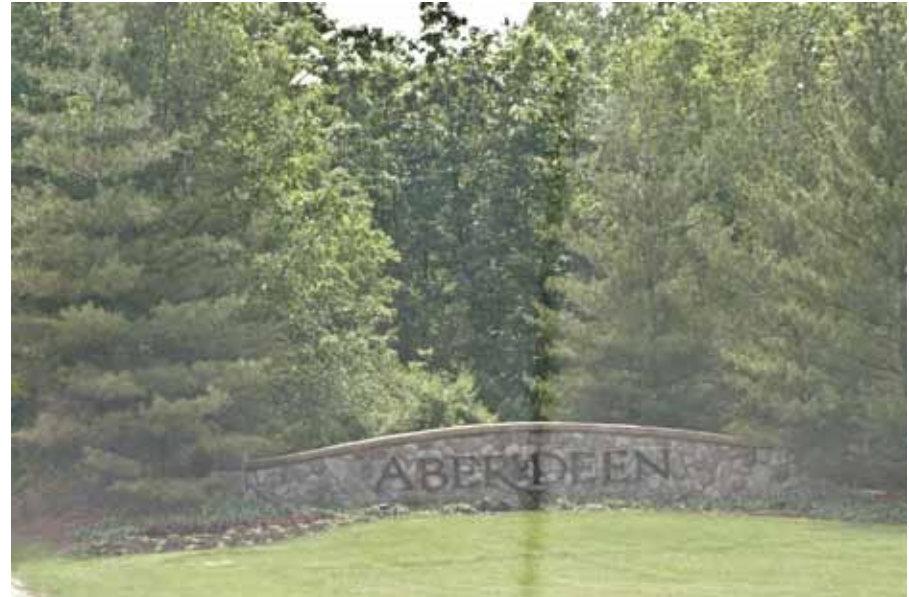
The campus and its buildings and chapel is one of the high points of Valparaiso. Unlike the Chicago Theater, several marketing pieces around town provided information leading to the chapel as a visitor attraction, and once there, I found it well worth the visit (bottom right).



On to Aberdeen (top right) and a beautiful gateway sign! But is this the golf course or the town?

Great job with the wayfinding signs (bottom left)... but be sure to keep them well painted. The lettering should be 6 inches to 8 inches tall, unless these are for pedestrians only. These are difficult to read from a vehicle, even if you are just one car length away. General rule: 1" tall lettering for every 12' of viewing distance.

This (bottom right) was the only sign I found for the golf course and this is the biggest attraction in the southern part of the county? We had to actually be looking directly at it to know where we were. Be sure to include signage for all your attractions and amenities - not only will you help visitors know what you have to offer and how to find it, but you'll also educate your locals about what there is to see and do in the community.



Very nice sign (top right). This should be one of the “Best Of” features promoted throughout the county. Add wayfinding signage to get here. This was the first we’d heard of it.

On to Hebron (bottom left) ... First impressions are lasting impressions. This gateway sign is much too cluttered, and the chain link foundation does not present a good first impression of the community.

Note how the town of Gig Harbor, Washington (bottom right) displays their community service organization signs. This attractive sign is placed where people can stop, get out, or simply note the times and location for weekly meetings. This same style of sign display can be used for the churches and sports teams.

Suggestion: Replace this sign, in a better location, and make it a directory or listing rather than just a hodge podge collection of metal signs pasted to a chain link background. Make this a nice gateway sign as that of Aberdeen. Make a statement.



Always put your gateway signs where you will make the first, best impression - which is seldom at the city or town limits. Place your auxiliary organization signs where people can stop and get out of the car to read them, such as in the example top right, in Woodlands, Texas.

At your gateways (bottom left) make them shine. Suggestions: Get rid of the green “Hebron” sign in the foreground. It serves no purpose. Maintain the lawn area. Plant some shrubs to hide the utility boxes. Get rid of the post next to the light pole. Replace the gateway sign as suggested on the previous page.

Same thing on the other end of town (bottom right). This is sign clutter at its worst. There are more than 20 signs here. There should be only one.

Your gateway signs are a visitor’s introduction to your community. They make a statement about the quality and type of community in which you live, so they should be attractive, uncluttered, and increase the perceived value of the town. What’s your first impression based on these images?



We wanted to show our support and spend money in Hebron. (top right) Unfortunately ...

...we had a tough time finding places to spend money with the number of closed businesses in town (bottom two photos). Suggestion: Consider creating a retail incubator to help seed new grass roots businesses in the community.

Do not allow chain link fencing downtown (bottom left). Instead, consider a picket fence (If Dairy Queen should reopen in the future). Is it closed for the day, month, year, forever?

The number of closed businesses indicate to visitors that the town is in decline.

Work on recruiting an anchor tenant to town. Once you have that “anchor,” it will be easier for other businesses to be successful. Many downtowns have been successful by targeting a niche retail market. Begin by seeing what your community’s retail strengths already



Critical Mass is More Than a Religious Experience

The 10+10+10 rule:

1. "Rearrange the business mix" to have like businesses grouped together. Think antique mall, auto mall, food courts, etc.
2. You must have consistent hours. NOTE: 70% of ALL consumer spending takes place after 6:00 pm. Are you open?
3. Work to make downtown a gathering place. The place to "hang out."
4. Just as malls cannot succeed without "anchor tenants," neither can downtowns.

Shopping & dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity of visitors, and where 80% of visitor spending takes place.

THE TEN+TEN+TEN RULE:

THE MINIMUM necessary in three lineal blocks to achieve the critical mass to attract visitor spending:

1. TEN places that sell food: Soda fountain, coffee shop, bistro, cafe, sit-down restaurant, wine store, deli, confectionary.
2. TEN destination retail shops: Galleries, antiques (not second hand stores), collectibles, books, clothing, home accents, outfitters, brand-specific businesses, garden specialties, kitchen stores, cigars, etc.
3. TEN places open after 6:00: Entertainment, theater (movies, performing arts), bars & bistros, specialty shops, dining, open air markets, etc.

Case histories:

Jefferson, Texas (bottom far right)

Brand: The Antique Capital of Texas

Population: 2,500

Antique dealers: 125. People drive four hours to go antiques here.

Beaumont, Texas' - Crockett Street (bottom near right)

Brand: Dancing & entertainment

District size: one block

Business mix: Four dance clubs, four restaurants, all open late. Visitor come from Houston, 80 miles to spend the weekends at Crockett Street.



More examples:

Chautauqua County, New York (top, near right)

Brand: The World's Learning Center

Population: 140,000 in the county

Anchor tenant: Chautauqua Institution with a nine week educational season.

Opportunity: Every community is now working to tap into the brand

Round Rock, Texas (top, far right)

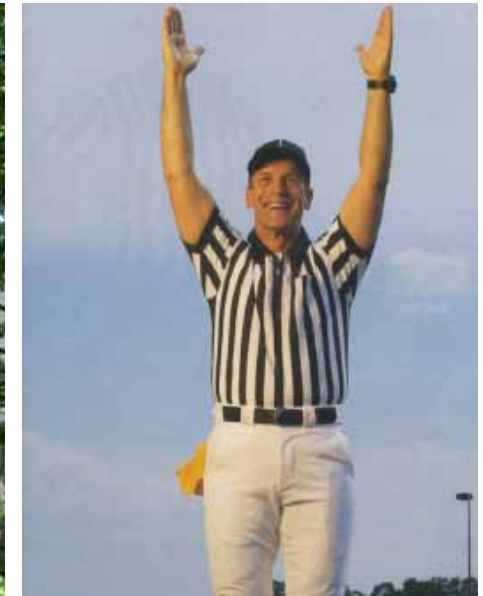
Brand: The sports capital of Texas - "Game On"

Population: 100,000

Anchor tenant: 500 acre sports park, Nolan Ryan's Round Rock Express

Opportunity: Everyone tapping into the brand. Scheels considering first store in Texas in Round Rock: 300,000 sq. ft.

Bottom photos show scenes from Argyle Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, a two block long dining district that is now home to 22 restaurants. Argyle Street has become the central place to hang out in the entire province.



Argyle Street in Halifax, Nova Scotia (photos this page and previous page, bottom) has become a lively restaurant destination for the entire region in Nova Scotia. With 22 restaurants in just two blocks, it attracts people from all over the province and even from Maine. The restaurants are permitted to set up outdoor dining all along the sidewalks, and they make the dining intimate and very attractive with the use of potted trees, shrubs, and flowers, as well as awnings and Catalina umbrellas.

One restaurateur actually has four different, competing restaurants on the street. In response to our query about the competition between them, he responded that, to the contrary, there wasn't competition, only the opportunity to capture more business and earn more money. The more you have to offer, the further people will come and the longer they will stay. Walnut Creek, California, near Oakland, (population 60,000) has 85 restaurants in its downtown and it's become a very popular destination city.

Argyle Street is a great example of how critical mass leads to success. This was all done on a very meager budget.



This mural (top right) is a great asset you can build upon. Suggestion: Clean up the weeds and add a coat of paint to the building around the mural. Keep it looking fresh. Add an interpretive sign that tells the story shown in the mural.

Have a city clean-up day (bottom photos). Make it an event to encourage participation.

The plantings in front of the town hall are very nice. Consider adding some planters and hanging baskets up against the building. Set the standard for the rest of the town. The sign should be placed closer to the street.



These Porter County Tourism Sojourn signs (top right) were all over the county - what is Sojourn? These gateway signs do more to promote the tourism organization than the community of Kouts. Suggestion: Develop your own gateway signs. Gateway signs should be about Kouts, not the tourism office.

Suggestions (bottom photo): Keep temporary plastic and canvas banners to a minimum (bottom photo). Banners should not be used as permanent signage - they should be used for special sales or events, and for only two weeks maximum. Clean up the weeds. Add some seasonal plantings. Make the outside of the building look attractive to help draw customers into the store.



Very good job with your beautification efforts here (top right). Using the concrete blocks to give some planting variations in height is a great idea. This type of beautification makes it obvious the business is open, it gets attention, and makes it look like a great place to shop.

Suggestions:

Add some benches or seating (bottom left). Outdoor seating makes a sidewalk more inviting.

What a great little shop! (bottom right) Suggestions: Instead of the plastic banners, use flags that say "Open." They are more attractive and festive than temporary banners. Also, add some table and chairs on the deck to allow customers to have their treats outside. Definitely remove the "Blood" sign below, even if it IS a contractor, as this is an eating establishment. Add a few hanging baskets from the awning.



Kouts, you have the greatest opportunity here! Several restaurants all clustered together help to create critical mass, or enough of a draw to bring folks from out of town (top right). Good job with the blade sign. Add some potted flowers along this exterior wall to soften the transition between the building and the sidewalk. Consider giving the building some color. Why does everything have to be brown, beige or grey?

Nice sign (bottom left). Well done.

Still in business? (bottom right) Our guess: It's been closed for years. It's hard to tell! Suggestions: If it is, in fact, still open for business clean up the front of the building by weeding and repainting the wood trim around the windows. Add planter boxes filled with flowers to make it more inviting. Update the sign to something more modern or reflective of the community.



Restaurants and retail shops should always use perpendicular signage (like the Depot did).

Add some potted flowers and shrubs in front of these two pizza restaurants (top and bottom left). Take a look at Wilson's (bottom right) in Door County, Wisconsin, a very popular soda fountain. By adding the awning and a row of flowers, they created a charming and inviting outdoor dining area. Consider adding outdoor dining like this along this entire block--it creates a welcoming and beautiful spot, and attracts customers. These shops in Kouts all have tremendous potential and are well maintained. Now just take it up a notch. Consider a cooperative buying program for planters, benches, hanging baskets. Then add some exterior seating and places to hang out.



Remember the importance of curb appeal for restaurants, retail shops, wineries, golf courses, and lodging. This restaurant in Door County, Wisconsin (top right) is a great example of excellent curb appeal - the brightly painted building and trim, umbrellas, potted shrubs and flowers, and outdoor dining really pulls customers in for dining. The outdoor dining is placed on what was part of the parking lot. But by screening it with planters, shrubs, tables and umbrellas, it created terrific ambiance. It increased their sales by more than 70 percent.

This menu display (bottom left) is a very good example of a functional and beautiful way to show potential customers what's on the menu - posting menus outside, and making them attractive displays, is an excellent way to entice people into a restaurant.

Suggestion: Can you hire one of those graduates to maintain these gardens? (bottom right) The weeds are overtaking the annual color.



Suggestion: You have to go with the restaurant theme for your downtown; according to the sign, (top right) everyone else in town will be towed! Clean up this main intersection. Cut back the weeds, keep it clean and tidy. Perhaps a Boy Scout project?

Remember: 70% of your sales can come from curb appeal. Add planter boxes or pots on either side of the door (bottom left), or under the windows, and fill them with colorful flowers. Plastic banners should only be used for two weeks at most.

Invite us back! (bottom right) Get rid of all “Closed” signs. Closed signs are like telling customers to just go away. Invite us back, and let us know when (or if) you will be open.



A “Closed” sign can mean the business is closed for lunch, or it can mean closed for the day, or the season, or it’s out of business. Let visitors know when you **WILL** be open. Instead of using signs that just say “closed,” consider using signs like these (top and bottom left).

Now let’s talk about the parks...

There is a lovely and very busy walking trail around this one! (bottom right) It is very nice and was full of locals and visitors in the evening. We were directed to this location by several locals. It’s helpful to give people a place to spend money in a location like this that attracts so many people. Finally, a place to hang out. Too bad there’s no place to spend money here!



But then the frustration with the parks system began ... (top right) we followed the directional signs here to find Sunset Hill Farm County Park.

Gee, it was supposed to be right here (bottom left). Maybe we missed it.

Sure enough, there it is, on the other side (bottom right). Be sure your wayfinding signs “connect the dots” all the way through. Once again, this is why the county, working with the various communities needs to develop a comprehensive wayfinding system. All too often we found it very difficult to find your attractions, amenities and important services. This became a theme throughout all of Porter County, starting at the dunes.



Finally, we've arrived (bottom left). Gorgeous sign with lots of nice color and well maintained plantings. This creates a terrific first impression. Contrast this with...

The next one (bottom right). Difficult to read, small print and not a good color choice. Suggestions: The background should be darker colors to make the white text easier to read. Rather than putting the rules and regulations at the entrance, they should be placed in the parking lot. Be sure to keep it updated.

Some rules:

- No more than five lines of text at a gateway location
- Rules and regulations should always be placed where people can read them when they get out of the car.
- Make it a single sign rather than 14 different signs.

This sign should just welcome people to the park. It can also include park hours. All the rules and regulations should be separate.



The 24 hour visitor information here (top right) is very good. Be sure to keep this area cleaned up. The pedestrian wayfinding signs are also very good.

This map (bottom left) is difficult to read. Update it or replace it once a year- and be sure to have printed copies available at the information kiosk, so that people can take a copy with them. For a first time visitor, it would be very hard to memorize the map before we head out on our walk.

Alas, the sign we needed (bottom right), but on our way out, coming from the opposite direction. Be sure to have good signage from all directions.

Keep the signs clean and planters well maintained. Perhaps a family or retired folks can adopt this park planter (bottom right).



Off to the Nature Preserve (top right). It sounds like a good place for a hike.

It's on the city map, and the GPS says we should turn right here (bottom left). Once again, where's the wayfinding signage?

We drove 1-1/2 miles but never found it.

This is the only evidence we can find that it might even have existed (bottom right). Suggestion: Take this sign down. It serves no purpose.

Be sure to keep your maps and information up to date. Disappointed visitors don't encourage friends and family to make a visit.



OK, we are not giving up. We'll head out to the other nice looking county park on the map (top right).

But no, it's not there either (bottom left). Again, be sure your maps are current. It's frustrating to visitors to end up on never ending "wild goose chases!"

Develop the "Hidden Gems of the Indiana Dunes & Porter County." Take a look at this example of a similar publication - "101 Things To Do In Door County" (bottom right). This privately developed small book is devoted to all the special things a visitor can enjoy while in Door County. These "hidden gems" are things to do that locals would know about, but visitors might not be able to discover on their own, such as the best beach for viewing sunsets; the best bakery for scones or cherry pie; where to rent a bicycle and some fun little bike rides; where to enjoy a bowl of homemade chowder on a veranda under the trees. They are so specific that readers immediately feel immersed in the place, and can't wait to get to Door County to enjoy all these activities.



More than ever before:

People hunger for those “Third Places.” The “First Place” is our home. The “Second Place” is where we work. And the “Third Place” is where we go to meet with friends and family, relax, stroll, hang out.

Suggestions:

- Create gathering areas
- Turn downtown parks into plaza areas
- Create permanent open-air markets, which have been steadily growing in popularity among locals and visitors.
- Bring downtown to life! Recruit artisans and street musicians to create a lively, action-filled downtown as you can see in these examples. Start on Friday evenings, Saturdays and Sundays.



All in all:

South Porter County is a terrific area with tremendous potential.

- It's close to the third largest metro area in the U.S.
- There are great “bones” to work with and most of the county is close to major interstates and/or highways.

Here are several things you can do today to make a difference tomorrow:

- Find your niche. Your brand - what sets you apart and makes you worth a special trip.
- Get the champions on board. Find those people who will work to develop and promote your special niche.
- Develop a county-wide visitor information kiosk system to cross sell other areas of the county.
- Create destination retail districts in your downtowns - remember the importance of “critical mass.” Recruit shops, restaurants, and entertainment to downtown to help build the critical mass that will attract people.
- Life after 6:00 is key to success. Most spending occurs after 6:00 p.m., and visitors want to spend the night in a place where there is something to do after 6:00. Work to keep shops open later, increase entertainment options.
- Work at beautification - people love to be in beautiful places, and merchants need to work on their curb appeal to pull customers into their stores. Keep streets and sidewalks clean and free of weeds.
- Encourage activities downtown, such as street musicians, artists in action, outdoor food vendors, outdoor markets.



Success Begins With a Good Architect

The rule of planning

Suggestion: Create a **County-wide Branding** (what you want to be known for), **Development** (what you have to do to “own” that brand) & **Marketing** (how to tell the world) **Action Plan** (no more strategic plans. You need a to do list). It should address:

- Brands and sub-brands
- Product development initiatives
- It should dovetail with downtown, city, economic development efforts
- Roles should be defined - who does what. It takes a village.
- Marketing: advertising, public relations, internet specifics
- The brand graphics package & Style Guide
- Detailed budgets
- Capital projects identified
- Cross-participation defined



Branding, Development, & Marketing Action Plan

Distance Marketing Assessment

The following few pages contain assessments by our secret shoppers, who researched the area from a distance, reviewing marketing materials to see if they could find the area, and if the materials were convincing enough to make them want to visit.

Indiana Assessment #1

I did the majority of my research on Indiana on the official travel website, www.in.gov/visitindiana/. Searching for “attractions” statewide brought up 294 items, so I found their sample itineraries to be particularly helpful in narrowing things down.

The first area that I was drawn to was the area in and around Indianapolis, particularly for a family trip. This would include Conner Prairie living history museum in Fishers, just north of Indianapolis; the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis; Caribbean Cove Indoor Water Park; Indianapolis Zoo; and finally, O’Reilly Raceway Park.

Another area that looked interesting was the area in and around Tippecanoe, including Lafayette, and Battle Ground. This trip might include shopping in historic downtown Lafayette, the Farmers Market, Wolf Park in Battle Ground, Battle of Tippecanoe Battleground and Museum, Wabash Heritage Trail, Fort Quiatenon, Tropicana Cove Family Aquatic Center, and Columbian Park Zoo.

In Northern Indiana, I found a number of interesting things to do in the Chesterton, South Bend and Nappanee area. This would include Indiana Dunes State Park near Chesterton, University of Notre Dame in South Bend, South Bend Chocolate Company Factory and Museum, and Amish Acres in Nappanee.

Also in Northern Indiana, the communities of Fremont, Albion, and Kendalville had some unique attractions, including Wild Wind Buffalo Preserve, Satek Winery, Potawatomi Inn at Pokagon State Park, Black Pine Animal Park and the Mid-America Windmill Museum.

Finally, an area that looked good for a weekend away as a couple or with girlfriends was Brown County. This trip might include the Nashville Express Tour Train to the Village of Nashville, the Story Inn and a show at one of the Nashville theaters; plus outdoor recreation such as hiking or horseback riding at Brown County State Park and a visit to the TC Steele State Historic Site.

There were two main areas I found that might be worth a special trip in the southeast Indiana area:

The first place I was drawn to in southeastern Indiana is Madison. It looks like a nice place for a weekend getaway, either for a couple or a group of friends. I can see spending one night in Madison, especially at a quaint B&B. I think the ambiance of the town, along with shopping, historic sites, homes and museums, and wineries would make for a nice relaxing weekend getaway.

Another trip that sounded interesting is the “Explore Down Under” itinerary highlighted on the Visit Indiana website. This included Squire Boone Caverns in Mauckport, Corydon Capital State Historic Site, downtown Corydon, Marengo Cave, Leavenworth, Wyandotte Cave, Spring Mill State Park in Mitchell and Bluespring Caverns. Exploring a variety of caves over a two or three day period could be an interesting and unique trip, and spending some time in the community of Corydon could be a nice diversion as well.

Indiana Assessment #2

Trip Advisor shows the top 10 Attractions in Indiana to be:

- Holiday World & Splashin’ Safari
- Children’s Museum of Indianapolis
- Indianapolis Museum of Art
- Conner Prairie
- Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial
- Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art
- Indiana Medical History Museum
- The Lincoln Museum
- Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area
- Indianapolis Motor Speedway and Hall of Fame Museum

This list doesn't really show me anything I'd be compelled to go see. I'm not wowed.

I googled Indiana Tourism and Visit Indiana (<http://www.in.gov/visitindiana/>) website is listed first. As I know nothing, I clicked on Trip Ideas, clicked on Family Fun and was given a list. I thought "Two One of a Kind Communities" sounded interesting.

Madison is featured as a river town with 20 blocks of Historic homes and Columbus is known for its modern architecture. The website (<http://visit-madison.org/>) has tiny type, and clicking on museums, I thought there was only one, but then realized you can scroll down. Not a very dynamic website. Columbus deserves a quick look and clicking on its website (<http://columbus.in.us/>) reveals a very colorful and dynamic invitation to visit. It mentions how great its architecture is, but when you click on that category there are numerous listings without pictures—to show architecture you need photos or renderings!

Both places seem okay, but not for a special trip - back to the state's website for more ideas. "Hands-on Family Fun" sounds good, and clicking on this listing mentions Conner Prairie (<http://connerprairie.org/>), which is an interpretive village of 19th-century American culture. The website is informative, and it appears you could spend a day there. It is very near Indianapolis, so I would stay there if I were to go Conner Prairie. Perhaps we would stay at the Caribbean Cove indoor water park (<http://www.caribbeancovewaterpark.com>). Also listed are the classic things like the zoo, children's museum and the O'Reilly raceway. While all places have their own character, they seem like pretty typical tourist attractions. Conner Prairie would be fun if your kids were 12 or younger.

Exploring Outdoor Recreation might give me some better ideas: "Uniquely Kosciusko sounds interesting. The Village at Winona (<http://villageatwinona.com/>) has an okay website, it does look like a peaceful place. They have an excellent map of the village showing all the dining, lodging and attractions. LOVE that when you click on Artisan Court and then Galleries or Artisans and Shops it lists them and takes you directly to their page with all necessary info. Perhaps this village is worth a visit.

The next listing is Pierceton (<http://www.theantiquetown.com/>). One look at their sad website and I kept on clicking, moving on to the Kosciusko County CVB website (<http://koscvb.org/>). Cute picture of a mom and daughter painting pottery, but they claim to be "one of the most beautiful areas in the Midwest"—let's see some scenery. Looking at the map, the county is filled with lakes, but there are no pictures and under What's Happening it is a list of Antique Dealers. The state website says the visitors center will give you a GPS unit to go geo-caching in their county, but there is no mention of this at the website! Also mentioned for this visit is a ride on a paddleboat and a visit to Oakwood Retreat and Conference Center (<http://www.oakwoodinn.org>), the state site fails to mention this is a Christian retreat. Still searching...

I spoke with a representative at the state tourism office who answered several questions; I think we were on the phone for about eight minutes. She suggested I visit N. Indiana, as my teenage sons would enjoy the Dunes State Park on the shores of Lake Michigan. We ruled out the Amish country, and she said Southern Indiana was known for its riverboats. I asked about river rafting and she said there were no rapids, but we could rent kayaks, and I would find the information in my packet she was sending (ETA 4 weeks!). Also, canoe country is just north of Indianapolis, and she thought the boys might like that area. She gave me drive times from Indianapolis to other major cities; it is very central to everything. In closing, she thought we should visit the Indy 500 car museum—a natural for most boys.

The Department of Natural Resources website regarding the Dunes (http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/properties/park_dunes.html) is not very pretty, and there are no pictures! Also, I need a cabin or lodge, as I won't be schlepping camping gear. The state needs a more tourist focused website than the DNR site. Chesterton is the nearest city I will try Google to see how the town is listed. NW Indiana.com is listed third and the chamber site is seventh. The NW IN site (<http://www.northwestindiana.com/cities/chesterton/chesterton.htm>) just give the facts with a link to the chamber. The Chamber site (<http://www.chestertonchamber.org/>) is very pale and the picture shows a big pond, not sandy dunes. There is no visitor link, so maybe Local Links will help? Numerous educational institutions are listed and a few chambers—I just want to see what the dunes look like and find a cabin! The state chamber website (<http://www.indianachamber.com/>) is no help. I called the Chesterton Chamber, and according to the representative, Chesterton is "long way"

from Indianapolis, about three hours. There are no accommodations on the lakeshore, and you cannot rent boats or kayaks unless you go to Michigan, where they have lakeshore rentals. We can stay in Chesterton and drive to the Dunes State Park. She will send me information, as there are “too many listings to go over on the phone.” Visiting the Chesterton website (<http://www.chestertonin.org/>) Tourism Recreation tab gives me nothing, no dining, accommodations or attractions. I clicked around a few other minor sites and still do not have a clear idea of the dunes and their magnitude or lack of.

Amish Country is worth a look (<http://www.backroads.org/>). Very pleasing website, I’m encouraged by the picture of three teens/men in kayaks and large tabs for all of the essential tourist needs. There are numerous lodging options, the Shipshewana Flea Market looks like fun, maybe a buggy ride? Some of the information has direct links and others just show pictures.

Back to the drawing board (state website) and Eastern IN. The Lincoln Museum (<http://www.backroads.org/>) is worth a try. A would visit this museum if I were in the area. I would also visit the Fort Wayne Museum of Art (<http://fwmoa.org/>). The museum had a wonderful variety of exhibits! The city’s website (<http://www.visitfortwayne.com/>) is tasteful and helpful. Auburn also looks like it has a lot to offer between the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum and the American Heritage Village: World War II Victory Museum and the Kruse Automotive and Carriage Museum, also the Hoosier Air Museum.

Western IN offers a visit to Lafayette and Tippecanoe (http://www.in.gov/visitindiana/trip_ideas/lafayette.aspx), the three-day plan looks like fun. Lafayette (<http://lafayettewestlafayettedowntown.com/>) has a pleasant website and it looks like a nice enough place. Fort Ouiatenon (<http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/ouiatenon.htm>) also looks interesting, and so does the Tippecanoe Battlefield (<http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/battlefield.htm>). Also mentioned is yet another water park.

Central IN (http://www.in.gov/visitindiana/trip_ideas/ideas_central.aspx) offers a few car/race related travel ideas and a wine tour (<http://www.indywinetrail.com/>). Naturally, Indianapolis (<http://indy.org/>) has to be investigated. Wow! The home page reminds me of Home Depot because of the bright orange. It looks like a fun city and the folks answering the phone said we

would have plenty to do. They could not give any suggestions regarding the rest of their state.

Moving south to South Central IN, I choose a trip idea called Romantic river, (http://www.in.gov/visitindiana/trip_ideas/river.aspx) and that suggests Madison, which I already mentioned, and the Ohio River Scenic Byway (<http://www.byways.org/explore/byways/2286/>). The river looks pretty in the picture and there are couple interesting stops. Other offerings in this area don’t really wow me—antique malls, premium outlet shopping and a gourmet popcorn store.

What does Southern IN have to offer but yet another water park in Santa Claus, IN and more President Lincoln historical sites. As it was listed on the top 10 the Lincoln Boyhood Museum (<http://www.nps.gov/libo>) must be checked out. It looks interesting, but I think if you go to Conner Prairie it would be similar, but without Lincoln history. More parks are mentioned, but the DNR site doesn’t show any many pictures, which makes it too hard!

So, I have checked out the state top to bottom and I have to say that I would not leave Washington just to visit Indiana. I am not sure I would leave Chicago to visit Indiana, unless I was a Lincoln scholar or loved car racing. The top five things I would see if I landed there due to visiting a relative or a business meeting would be:

- Fort Wayne
- Indianapolis
- Conner Prairie
- Columbus
- Madison

I would like to take advantage of the calm waterways, so I would also investigate a canoe/kayak trip. None of the smaller towns I looked at really caught my attention. I think Madison and Columbus appeal to me as I have an interest in architecture. I think the contrast between the two cities would be interesting.

Indiana Assessment #3

I started my Indiana research with “Off the Beaten Path - A Guide to Unique Places - Indiana.”

Probably the first place in the state I'd want to visit is Indianapolis - since it's the hub of the state, and would have a lot to see and do. Of course, there's the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which would be a must-do activity for any visit to the state.

Another place that caught my attention is Zionsville Colonial Village, a shopper's mecca, from what the guide book describes. The Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne would also be on the list. The Festival of the Hunter's Moon in Lafayette in October sounds intriguing, as well as the Fiddlers' Gathering in June in Battle Ground.

In Southeast Indiana, the Celtic Celebration in Rising Sun in March sounds like fun, as well as the Scottish Festival in Columbus in September. There's also the Historic National Road Yard Sale on Highway 40 in May and June - that would be a one-of-a-kind experience. The town of New Harmony in Southwest Indiana would be a fun visit.

After looking through the Guidebook to get a feel for the State and what it might offer to do, I took a look at the State's tourism website. I found the site to be very easy to use, easy to find information, and appealing. I especially like the itineraries - a visitor can search for things to do by activity in certain areas, and will receive specific two and three day itineraries of specific places to go, places to eat, and things to do that fit with their search. Very well done!

In the Eastern part of the State, I chose to look at "Wild Buffalo, Wine and Windmills." I received a two day itinerary that included a trip to the Wild Wind Buffalo Reserve in Fremont, a visit to Satek Winery (80% of their wines are awarded medals!), spend the night at the Potaawatomi Inn at Pokagon State Park near Angola. There's a nature center there, as well as bike trails and boat tours. Day two includes a visit to the Black Pine Animal Park to see exotic animals - and their gift shop. Then a visit to the Mid-America Windmill Museum with more than 20 restored windmills.

There are a variety of itineraries for each area, and they are all very well put together.

The South Central area has an itinerary called "Learn A Little - Shop A Lot" which would be a great couple's getaway. Starting with an architectural tour of Columbus, then spending time at Simmons Winery, then on to Elsbury's Greenhouses, and finishing the evening at the Boggstown Cabaret, a remnant of the old 1930s Supper Clubs dinner theatre. The next day includes a visit to the Exit 76 Antique Mall with over 550 antique vendors, and a stop at Not Just Popcorn for a treat.

Southern Indiana seems to have a lot to offer too, with the Lincoln Boyhood national Memorial, the Buffalo Run Farm, Grill and Gifts (that offers buffalo and ostrich burgers), Lincoln State Park for canoeing, swimming, and hiking. The park has cabins available too. Jasper has a German restaurant, the Schnitzelbank, famous for its Schnitzel, Sauerbraten, Kraut Balls and more.

It surprised me, but it seems that there really are quite a lot of fun things to do in Indiana. These itineraries do a great job of showing what all there is to see and do. The only major attraction I found is the Motor Speedway, but the rural areas around the state seem to have some cute and fun things to do too. However, I wouldn't make a special trip flying to Indiana for any of these getaways. If I lived within 200-300 miles, I would consider some of the itineraries as a two or three day getaway.

My suggestion for each county would be to select some of your best gems - what special shops, great activities, beautiful hiking or biking trails, fabulous wineries, best restaurants, etc. Then put together some of these great itineraries, using those outstanding assets, linked together into a two or three day getaway. The state has done a very good job on their website - you could expand those itinerary offerings with more of them. Promote them on your websites and in a brochure. When visitors see isolated attractions, they don't necessarily put them all together into a fun itinerary for themselves; that's why it's so important to make it easy for them, building the itineraries yourself. Then visitors can see that they'll have plenty of fun things to do, nice places to stay, and great food to eat.

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