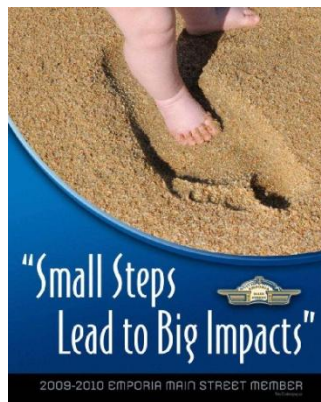


Times are Changing...

News, trends and opportunities from the National Main Street Convention



The National Main Street convention allows members from Emporia Main Street to learn cutting edge community and business development techniques from a variety of national experts in one location. Three days of information can be a bit overwhelming, but individuals that attended the event have a lot to share with the community. In the coming weeks, the weekly newsletter will provide a synopsis of many different classes/topics covered at the National Convention, but we thought it was important to give you an overview of some of the themes we heard repeated constantly throughout our three days in Oklahoma City.

Your business marketing success will require a social media component in the near future- Facebook, twitter, four-square, web applications... One marketing professional stated rather bluntly "in five years, if your businesses don't know how to use these tools they won't be in business". Simply existing on-line isn't enough. Strategies must be implemented which magnify your presence and keep your customer's attention. ResultsRevolution.com had a presentation which highlighted the need for social networking components in a business marketing plan, such as the fact that Facebook recently became the largest media company in the world, 63% of people across all demographics turn to the Internet FIRST when researching products and services. Facebook has over 400 million users worldwide, two thirds of which are women from the ages of 25-65. 74% of all middle income Americans visit YouTube (owned by Facebook) more than once every two weeks, and the number one reason they visit is product research. Twitter has 180 million unique visitors a month, and heavy Twitter users generally comprise a market segment referred to as "influencers" for their ability to shape market opinion.

Small businesses are the key to community success- At Main Street, we have been preaching this for years, but more data continues to support this fact. 85% of all jobs in Kansas exist in businesses with 20 or fewer employees. Great job growth numbers recently came out on a federal level, and 70% of the new jobs created were in small businesses. For our economy to recover, and our nation to prosper, we need to focus on small businesses. While other nations have been recognized for their efficiency or cheap labor sources, the United States has always competed on the basis of ingenuity. Small businesses, by their very nature, compete through creativity and hard work. They aren't "too big to fail", but they are just the right



size to help us succeed.

Customer perceptions concerning the economic health and viability of an area are tied to aesthetics now more than ever before. I've had conversations with individuals that wonder why we work on trees, host trash pick ups, coordinate fantastic volunteers that beautify gardens, encourage good design habits in buildings and promote preservation/maintenance... Well, it's because consumers identify metal buildings and lack of design aesthetics with depressed economics. Because of that perception, people are willing to spend less, stop less and hang out less in areas that aren't aesthetically pleasing. The CID plan can aid with creating a more attractive community, but we must create other avenues to achieve a more visually pleasing community.



People want "hang outs". Green spaces, water parks, WiFi hot spots, outdoor festivals, live music, walkable environments and bike trails are all important aspects when creating denser communities. As we look forward 20 years in our community planning, it is absolutely clear that most communities must create dense mixed use facilities that are pedestrian and bike friendly that utilize access to public transportation. Oil production should hit its peak within the next 10 years, while oil demand from nation states like China will rapidly increase. Our transportation models, business models and social models will change rapidly as our access to energy changes.

Communities must take charge of their own futures by becoming business owners, developers and investors. Becoming pro-active in developing a better community now includes incubating a business, starting a community owned store/restaurant or becoming a developer to facilitate the types of buildings or upper story development needed to move a community forward. "Networking" or "facilitating" won't be good enough in the new economy. Communities must be willing to get their hands dirty, flex their muscles, pool their resources with local investors and fill market leakages. Communities like Emporia probably aren't going to get a Target or Olive Garden, but we can create similar products or services by working together and producing a community owned business.

Funding is key. Most entrepreneurs aren't wealthy, and our financial institutions have been put into some tough situations because of regulations stemming from the behavior of a few larger institutions. We, as a Main Street and as a community, must find alternative funding sources that help our financial institutions and entrepreneurs bridge the funding gap and produce viable businesses. Incentives Without Walls funding, Trusler Funding and Network Kansas funding have done well, but we must seek additional funds, tax credits and other vehicles to improve the viability of our businesses.

This isn't going to be easy. Change rarely is. The days of the good ol' boys in a smoke filled room setting the direction of a community are almost gone. Endless meetings for the sake of meetings, countless vision retreats and plans that sit on a shelf don't work in a society of lightning fast communication and instant expectations. People expect real, visible, tangible progress. To achieve that goal, we need people that are willing to do real work. There will be bumps in the road, and workers aren't always popular (the more you do, the more you can be criticized for), but moving businesses and core development forward isn't a luxury; it is necessary for the health of our community.



So, what are we doing right now to compensate for these trends highlighted above? We continue to work with businesses on Social Media (and the Emporia Gazette's new market place site is an excellent tool for businesses to get an instant web presence), we continue to expand aesthetic projects in the community through planters, bike racks, clean ups and design assistance. We are working with the Help Desk and Cable One to produce WiFi for events like Live in the Lot and the Dirty Kanza, which we hope will be a precursor to more permanent WiFi. Emporia Main Street is working with community entrepreneurs and developers to produce exciting businesses and projects in our community. We are also researching new funding options and incentives to redevelop and maintain EXISTING commercial areas in the community. In the coming weeks, you will here specific information highlighting successes in each of the aforementioned points

Back to home page: www.emporiainmainstreet.com