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25 Marketing Ideas You Can Steal

By Dariel Y. Curren

FROM TALENT ATTRACTION TO BRANDING AND WEBSITES, TACTICS THAT MOVE THE NEEDLE

Economic developers can draw inspiration from more than two dozen marketing ideas gleaned from communities around the globe. Learn best and next practices in research, branding, websites, media relations, digital advertising, talent attraction, crisis communications, metrics and much more.

Advertisement

The poster features a circular logo in the top left corner with a white star and skyline silhouette, surrounded by the text 'IEDC 2020 ANNUAL CONFERENCE' and 'OCT. 11-14, 2020-DALLAS'. The background is a photograph of the Dallas skyline at dusk, with the Reunion Tower and other skyscrapers visible. The word 'DALLAS, TEXAS' is written in large, bold, white letters across the middle. Below it, the text 'IEDC 2020 ANNUAL CONFERENCE' and 'OCTOBER 11-14, 2020' is displayed. At the bottom, a registration deadline is provided: 'Register by Aug. 7 to save up to \$200! Visit iedconline.org/Dallas'.

DALLAS, TEXAS

IEDC 2020 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
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25 marketing ideas

YOU CAN STEAL

By *Dariel Y. Curren*

With the global talent shortage, business, visitor and talent attraction marketing is beginning to align and converge. Effective marketing is now less about swagger and more about being authentic.

As specialists in economic development, tourism and talent attraction marketing, Development Counsellors International (DCI) has seen it all in our 60 years of business – the good, the bad, the ugly. All too often, we find that economic development organizations fall prey to the “sea of sameness.” Every community is a GREAT place to “live, work and play” and every community has a GREAT quality of life.

Economic developers would be wise to learn from their counterparts in travel marketing, who are often a step or two ahead in terms of high-impact marketing tactics and messaging. We are also big fans of taking a page from what consumer product companies are doing to attract customers, what sports teams are doing to win fans and what celebrities are doing to garner positive attention. It's good to get out of our economic development bubble.

Economic developers would be wise to learn from their counterparts in travel marketing, who are often a step or two ahead in terms of high-impact marketing tactics and messaging. We are also big fans of taking a page from what consumer product companies are doing to attract customers, what sports teams are doing to win fans and what celebrities are doing to garner positive attention. It's good to get out of our economic development bubble.

With that in mind, DCI scanned the marketing landscape and our own experience to capture 25 ideas you can “steal.” As the adage goes, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Obviously, no two communities are alike so there are no cookie-cutter marketing solutions, but we hope some of these ideas will spark ideas of your own.

1. Root It In Research: When Destination Cleveland was considering launching a talent attraction marketing campaign, the destination marketing organization didn't guess at what perceptions or misperceptions that working-age people across America had about the city and its appeal as a location to work. It did exactly what it does when it tries to gauge perceptions of potential visitors – it surveyed them. The organization targeted cities across America and then sliced and diced the data to pinpoint different points of view – which were quite different depending upon if the talent was in Atlanta or Chicago, for example. That means they can develop their marketing campaign with laser-like precision.

One Acadiana, a new nine-parish organization based in Lafayette, Louisiana, also leaned on research to brand the area. Although locals loved the rich history associated with the name Acadiana, surveys of site selectors revealed that only 5.6 percent thought that it was the best name for the region. Likewise, locals were on the fence about using “Cajun” in their branding efforts even though the area was at the heart of Cajun Country. A separate survey, however, indicated that a high percentage of talent and business executives had positive or neutral perceptions of “Cajun.” The organization landed on “South Louisiana: Real Cajun” as their economic develop-



Research, rather than guesswork, led One Acadiana to their new South Louisiana: Real Cajun brand, which resonates with business executives and talent alike.

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FROM TALENT ATTRACTION TO BRANDING AND WEBSITES, TACTICS THAT MOVE THE NEEDLE

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ment brand, which instantly located the region from a geographic standpoint and leveraged the world-renown of Cajun while dropping the word “country.”

2. Build a Powerful Metrics Dashboard: If you are not measuring your marketing, all you have is an opinion. Most economic development organizations use Google Analytics, but many have been slow to discover Google Data Studio. When connected to Google Analytics, it eliminates the time it takes to pull data manually and creates an easy-to-understand metrics dashboard. In one visual gulp, you can see where your traffic is coming from, what is driving the most engagement and conversions, how your marketing is trending month-over-month and much more. This tool allows you to customize your dashboard for your key performance indicators (KPIs) or simply use what Google has set up.

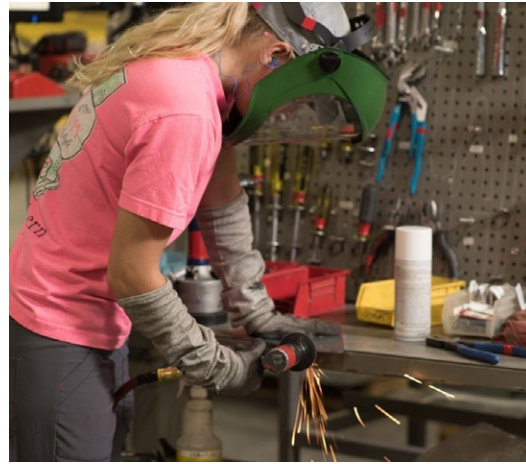
Although Google Data Studio is free (just Google it!), there are many other more sophisticated data visualization tools available at a price. Tableau is one option. It helps create interactive graphs and charts in the form of dashboards and worksheets to gain business insights.

3. Find Opportunity in the Wake of a Disaster: In 2017, wildfires in California ravaged the wine country in Sonoma and Napa Valley. More than 40 people died, and some 9,000 structures were destroyed, with losses totaling more than \$3 billion. Fortunately, the region's wineries were largely spared with only 10 of 1,200 vineyards shut down. With tourism as the lifeblood of the economy, Visit California sought to encourage visitation and, ultimately, support the region's road to recovery. They decided to celebrate Wine Country's resilience by hosting a Thanksgiving benefit dinner in partnership with Out Standing in The Field. The dinner, prepared by California's world-famous chefs and noted wine makers, was served on a 500-foot-long “Grateful Table” straddling the Napa and Sonoma border seating 500 people. It cost \$500 per person to attend and \$250 per person to sponsor a first responder or victim.

More than \$150,000 was raised for fire victims. Equally important was the national media exposure the event earned in Food & Wine, San Francisco Chronicle, Today Show and countless other outlets. The publicity was valued at more than \$3 million and led to an immediate decline in crisis-related travel trade inquiries and a rise in holiday bookings. So, in the words of the wise Winston Churchill, “Never let a good crisis go to waste.”



A 500-foot-long “Grateful Table” between Napa and Sonoma Valley helped get the word out that California’s Wine Country was open for business after wildfires.



Cleveland County, North Carolina, showcased success stories like that of Emily Bolton, who traded in a retail job for manufacturing, so people could see themselves on a new career path.

4. Market the Career Path: If you're trying to sell your community to talent, don't just market the jobs, market the career path. DCI's research of Gen Z and millennials shows that many career decisions are made in high school, well before college. If our country needs highly trained talent in careers like information technology and manufacturing, it's not enough to promote the jobs. We really have to change perceptions of the industries themselves.

Cleveland County, North Carolina, did just that – creating a one-stop-shop website dedicated to connecting millennials in nearby Charlotte to rewarding careers in manufacturing in Cleveland County. Because research shows that talent prioritizes salary and cost of living, Cleveland County worked to change the perception of manufacturing by leading with what's important: they clearly spelled out that a manufacturing career in Cleveland County means higher wages AND a lower cost of living.

They also made it personal so people could clearly see themselves taking the manufacturing career path. They showcased success stories like that of Emily Bolton, who traded in a retail job for manufacturing. In addition, they got the word out directly to high school students by creating a pocket brochure on why manufacturing in Cleveland County is not your grandfather's manufacturing job. But it's not just what these brochures said, it's where they put them. These brochures were placed in DMVs, baseball stadiums, high school guidance counselors' offices and other places high school students were likely to be.

5. Elevate Your Video Game: All research points to videos driving engagement when it comes to marketing. Many communities have videos that are nearly interchangeable that talk about their great business climate, their fabulous quality of life, their arts and culture, their outdoor recreation and their great dining and brewery scene. What we like to see are a series of short videos like those created by the Tampa Hillsborough Economic Development Corporation to focus on recent investments from companies like Amgen. They're short, they're sweet and they are intended to get the C-suite talking to the C-suite.

The Dallas Regional Chamber took another approach leveraging one of their most successful businessmen –

Mark Cuban – to carry their message of why talent should “say yes to Dallas” through a short video shot outside the American Airlines Arena.

Not every community has big budgets or big personalities to use, but there are some new tools available to make it quick, easy and inexpensive to create short videos that are great for posting on websites or social media. Lumen5, for example, combines powerful artificial intelligence with a simple drag-and-drop interface to help you create professional video content in minutes.

6. Attract Industry Events that Align with Your Key Sectors: Long known as the “salad bowl of the world” for all the lettuce, peppers and other vegetables it grows in its fertile farmland, Salinas, California, embarked upon a new mission six years ago to harness the region’s agricultural prowess and proximity to Silicon Valley to create an AgTech (agriculture technology) Innovation Ecosystem. City leaders dreamed of bringing Forbes’ Reinventing America series to their community, so they traveled to New York City to meet in person with the Forbes team to pitch them on the idea of an “AgTech Summit.” Forbes bit on the idea and more than 400 investors, growers, agriculture professionals and entrepreneurs convened in Salinas for the sold-out event. The event has been replicated several times. Having one of the biggest names in media host a summit in the city has helped put Salinas on the map as an AgTech hub.

7. Partner with Your DMO: We often think of economic development and tourism having two totally different audiences, but when it comes to talent – it’s the same. According to our research, the number one way talent forms location impressions is through first-hand experience. That means that today’s visitors can be tomorrow’s talent if you market to them correctly. Your destination marketing organization (DMO) or convention and visitors bureau (CVB) may be filling the top of your talent funnel with visitors, but how do you move

Although it’s good to drive a lot of traffic to your website, it’s also good to know what visitors are doing once they get there. Are they engaging with the content? Are they taking any meaningful actions?

them down the funnel to get those visitors to realize that your location is not just a great place to visit, but to live as well.

The State of Vermont closed the gap between tourism and talent head-on. The tourism and economic development offices collaborated to launch “Stay to Stay” – a new initiative designed to turn the state’s 13 million annual tourists into full-time residents. For several weekends, Vermont invites people to take part in the Stay to Stay program – a three-day lodging and networking package that connects visitors with employers and realtors and fully immerses them in the lifestyle of living and working in Vermont.

The program created serious media buzz and put Vermont in the national headlines. But the program isn’t just generating awareness, it’s generating action. The Stay to Stay pilot program launched in 2018 attracted 140 visitors. Twelve of the participants have already completed their move, and at last count, an additional 36 were actively job hunting, house hunting, or otherwise making plans to move to Vermont within the next year.

8. Track Conversions not just Visits: Although it’s good to drive a lot of traffic to your website, it’s also good to know what visitors are doing once they get there. Are they engaging with the content? Are they taking any meaningful actions? The Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency tracks everything: contact email clicks, PDF downloads, phone calls, meeting requests, e-newsletter signups. They also track how everything compares year over year. This is a very smart approach to see if their marketing program is working.

9. Get to Know Google Tools: Google Search Console is a free service that lets you learn a great deal of information about your website and the people who visit it. You can use it to find out things like how many people are visiting your site and how they are finding it, whether more people are visiting your site on a mobile device or desktop computer, and which pages on your site are the most popular. It can also help you find and fix website errors, submit a sitemap, and create and check a robots.txt file.

Google Analytics and Google Search Console might seem like they offer the same information, but there are some key differences between these two Google products. Google Analytics is more about who is visiting your site – how many visitors you’re getting, how they’re getting to your site, how much time they’re spending on your site, and where your visitors are coming from (geographically speaking). Google Search Console, in contrast, is geared

The Washington Post

Wonkblog

Vermont’s creative approach to its labor shortage: Hire the tourists

By Danielle Paquette April 20 [Email the author](#)



Vermont’s tourism and economic development offices collaborated on a “Stay to Stay” program, generating national media buzz to help draw talent to the Green Mountain State.

Most economic development organizations have a director of business development and likely a director of marketing, but what about a director of talent? When it comes to talent attraction, customer service is key. That is why the communities that are really seeing talent results have a dedicated talent director.

more toward more internal information – who is linking to you, if there is malware or other problems on your site, and which keyword queries your site is appearing for in search results. Be sure to use both!

10. Give Incentives to Talent: Economic development organizations help give incentives to companies, but if talent is the new currency of economic development, why not give incentives to talent? Money is one of the biggest obstacles for relocation – 85 percent of respondents in DCI's talent attraction research said they would describe themselves as willing to relocate. But when considering a new job, salary is the number one factor and respondents believe moving costs would be the most helpful relocation tool.

Economic developers from Vermont and Tulsa are attacking the cost question head-on: both communities have launched incentives for talent to relocate. Vermont's Remote Worker Grant Program offers reimbursement grants of up to \$5,000 per year (\$10,000 over two years) to remote workers across the country who move to Vermont. The current remote worker program, which is still in its first year, has resulted in 33 approved applications – at an average of \$3,700 reimbursement per application – meaning 87 people have moved (counting spouses, partners and children). Tulsa followed suit with a similar program. Both earned major national media coverage for this bold approach.

If you don't have that kind of funding, take a more targeted approach. In rural Decatur-Morgan County, Alabama, the entrepreneurial center did private fundraising to launch a STEM tuition reimbursement program for select individuals to relocate called the "Best and Brightest" initiative. Since its launch four years ago, 34 young professionals have moved to Decatur.

11. Hire a Talent Concierge: Most economic development organizations have a director of business development and likely a director of marketing, but what about a director of talent? When it comes to talent attraction, customer service is key. That is why the communities that are really seeing talent results have a dedicated talent director.

Here's why customer service is so important: DCI conducted an experiment a few years ago called "To catch a coder." We created a fictitious software developer and reached out to 28 different cities to ask about jobs in her field, as well as relocation resources. Only eight com-

munities responded and only one picked up the phone to call her (we supplied a burner phone!), which tells us communities are missing out on winning talent every day. Marketing drives awareness, but engagement drives attraction.

Case in point is what happened when the Baton Rouge Area Chamber hired a "talent concierge." The chamber heard from local employers like Exxon Mobil that they could sell the jobs, but they wanted one person qualified to sell the location. The chamber created a tour for candidates considering Baton Rouge led by a part-time talent concierge. A whopping 94 percent of those who take the tour relocate. The tour shows prospective talent – many of whom have had internships in the region – everything they need to know whether it's where to live or where to get their hair cut. All tour discussions are confidential, so talent really feels like the red carpet is being rolled out for them.

ICR Iowa, which represents Iowa City-Cedar Rapids, also has a talent director. They put him front and center of all their social media videos, because talent wants "real" people to interact with before relocating. ICR Iowa is also prioritizing the personal touch for talent by creating a "wingman" program that pairs newcomers with residents. They also have a "Talent Hub" digital resource where talent can easily fill a "Recruit Me!" form so local employers know to reach out. All these programs are part of ICR Iowa's goal to become "The Most Welcoming Region in America."

12. Connect with Cool Partners: Most communities have at least one cool, hip, locally connected company that is making its mark. Most economic development organizations, however, never think to partner with them. Take a page from the San Diego Regional Partnership. The organization partnered with local microbrewery Ballast Point to launch a special "Made in San Diego" beer.

Labelled with local neighborhoods and city names, as well as the "San Diego: Life. Changing." brand mark, the beer is sold exclusively in San Diego County and a portion of every case sold goes to support San Diego's small business and startup community. The campaign also encourages people to share a picture of themselves enjoying the "life-changing brew" using the hashtag #MadeinSD.



The San Diego Regional Partnership partnered with a local microbrewery to launch a special "Made in San Diego" beer and support the city's startup community.

13. Make Residents Your Best Ambassadors: Earned and paid media both get the word out about your community, but don't forget your location's best promoters: residents. We know from our research that residents play a powerful role in influencing talent perceptions – whether it's word of mouth or what talent hears from friends and family, or what locals post on social media.

The Charleston Regional Development Alliance, for example, launched a Charleston Open Source “digital ambassadors” program to get the word out about its tech opportunities. They knew techies hate being marketed to, so they wanted to do something authentic. With this program, they recruit local tech talent to share the latest news on Charleston's tech scene. This is like turning your residents into free billboards for your message. Because most people's social networks extend beyond where they live and work, the messages they disseminate can have a powerful ripple effect.

14. Focus on the Business Traveler: According to DCI's 2017 “Winning Strategies” survey of corporate executives and site selection consultants, 42 percent of corporate executives said that their perceptions of a location's business climate were affected by business travel. That indicates that a smart marketing tactic is to look for choke points that the business traveler passes through and find creative ways to reach them there. Several years ago, the economic development team in Philadelphia identified limousine services that catered to the business traveler. They then trained their drivers on positive key messages about the local business climate and placed promotional materials in the back seat of each vehicle.



Philadelphia trained drivers for executive limousine services on positive messages about the local business climate.

15. Communicate via the Streaming Revolution: There is little doubt that streaming is beginning to dominate the way the world consumes “shows” these days. Why not take a page from the State of Tennessee and create your own TV series? The Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development created “Re-mastered in Tennessee” on Amazon Prime to showcase some of the state's most iconic companies from Lodge Cast Iron to Burnett Firearms. The series blew it out of the park in terms of numbers with more than \$1.6 million in earned media value and 2 million online video views. To top it off, the show won an Emmy!

According to DCI's latest “Talent Wars” survey, one of talent's top relocation challenges is money. Underscoring the importance of housing costs and cost of living as important factors in relocation decisions, the surveyed talent indicated that covering moving costs would be the most powerful incentive when considering relocation.

16. Personalize a Digital Advertising Campaign for Individual Companies: With today's advanced digital targeting tools through LinkedIn and other platforms, it is possible to take a “hyper-targeted” approach to digital advertising. Economic development organizations can target specific companies and serve up tailor-made digital ads to the C-suite. Make sure the ads have a strong call to action and drive traffic to a relevant landing page on your website, with more calls to action such as downloading a useful whitepaper or requesting a call or meeting.

17. Create a Site Selection Advisory Board: While many economic development organizations recognize site selection consultants as important influencers, market to them and attend conferences where they will intersect with them, the State of Michigan took the unusual step a few years back of creating a site consultant advisory board with the help of Southwest Michigan First. They gathered a handful of consultants, brought them to Michigan to kick it off and then held quarterly meetings over the telephone to get their candid input on their programs and marketing.

18. Give Talent What They Really Want: According to DCI's latest “Talent Wars” survey, one of talent's top relocation challenges is money. Underscoring the importance of housing costs and cost of living as important factors in relocation decisions, the surveyed talent indicated that covering moving costs would be the most powerful incentive when considering relocation. While some companies already offer this benefit for senior-level employees, it is uncommon to see this offered widely. A free trip ranked at the top of the list and is seen as more helpful than other more costly options for companies like free training, tuition reimbursement or student debt repayment.

19. Stand out at a Trade Show: It can be a challenge to stand out at a busy trade show especially without a big budget. The North Dakota Commerce team, however, took a bold, creative approach with a good measure of humor, to generate buzz at the Association of Unmanned Vehicle Systems International conference. Attendees entering the restrooms were greeted with the following messages printed on removable decals:

- “Go #1 with North Dakota” appeared on the back of all women's room stalls.
- “Don't Go All Over. Hit Your Target with North Dakota” was the message above each urinal in the men's room.

The North Dakota Commerce team used clever bathroom humor at a trade show to capture attention and drive traffic to its booth.



- On the mirrors above the wash basins, both sexes were greeted with “Please Wash Your Hands. Then Come Over and Shake Ours at Booth #1051.”

The memorable gambit paid off with unprecedented traffic to the state’s booth.

20. Go Untraditional with Collateral: While printed brochures and invitations are fast going the way of the dinosaur, an untraditional approach to collateral can still make people sit up and take notice. A good example is when Scottish Development International wanted to grab the attention of seafood buyers at the Fancy Seafood Show in Boston. They engraved the invitation on a cedar plank that might be used for grilling their famed Scottish salmon and mailed the wooden plank without an envelope. They got a record-breaking turnout at their reception and the head buyer at Whole Foods said he put the invitation on this office shelf he liked it so much!

In another clever departure from the same old approach to collateral, Texas Economic Development Corporation decided to embrace the state’s tagline “Go Big in Texas” when it came time to create a new piece of marketing collateral. The piece looks like a regular-size rectangular mailer at the start but is die-cut and folds out into a giant shape of the Lone Star State loaded with Texas business advantages. It has turned out to be a big attention getter and conversation piece.



Scottish Development International sent seafood buyers attending the Fancy Seafood Show a “Taste of Scotland” invitation engraved on a cedar plank used for grilling salmon.

21. Embrace Stunts (Sparingly): Like so many communities around the country, there is a talent shortage in Iowa, so the Iowa Economic Development Authority got creative with its “This is Iowa” campaign. It involved a “Candid Camera-style” stunt where a fake real estate office was set up in New York City. An actor hired to portray a real estate agent told prospective customers about some great properties for rent and sale near micro-breweries and James Beard award-winning restaurants in up-and-coming neighborhoods. The customers were shocked by the amazing amenities and prices. But the biggest surprise was the location of the properties – Iowa – once it was revealed that the agent wasn’t talking about New York. The stunt generated significant media and social media coverage underscoring Iowa’s key messages on its lower costs for high caliber living.

22. Engage the Home Team: Few communities engage and leverage their local companies better than the Columbus Region. One Columbus, the economic development organization for the 11-county region, has spearheaded a “One of Us” campaign. They have a page on their website showcasing their companies with the headline, “Individually We Are Successful. Together, We Are Unstoppable.” Many of the region’s largest employers also run ads with The Columbus Region and One of US messaging. In addition, several companies are showcased in the Columbus airport with large banner ads to make a bold statement about the corporate presence in the region the minute people step off a plane.

23. Help, Don’t Hype: Mamava, a Vermont-based company, launched nursing pods in 2013 with some 900 pods in locations across the country. The company teamed up with Zappos to locate the pods in airports where Mamava operates. Easy to spot, each air-conditioned booth is plastered with a large image of a baby and features locking doors, a USB charging station, fold-down changing table and two benches – a safer, cleaner and more convenient alternative to the bathroom stalls mothers often use to breast-feed their babies. Instead of plastering the pods with Zappos ads, the company opted to educate people passing by with facts about the importance of breast feeding.



Instead of promoting itself on the Mamava nursing pods it sponsored at airports, Zappos educated people passing by with facts about the importance of breast feeding.

Human resource executives at your local employers and their recruiters are the ones talking regularly to talent, not necessarily economic developers.

24. Create Pop Up Experiences: Visiting your favorite cities around the globe has never been easier, because they're now coming to *you*. In Denver, the popular RiNo dining and retail destination, Zeppelin Station, created a unique program called "Made in a City," where visitors are immersed in a complete experience that stimulates all the senses and virtually transports them to a city. Combining music, art, retail, dining and other experiences, the concept aims to bring the essence of a place to the Denver audience. Cities as diverse as Portland, Montreal and Reykjavik have occupied the space for up to three months each.

25. Arm Those on the Front Lines of Talent Attraction: Human resource executives at your local employers and their recruiters are the ones talking regularly to talent, not necessarily economic developers. When they try to convince people to relocate, they get grilled about the location and often they don't know what to say, or they may be saying things that are inconsistent with one another, or could be stronger. To combat that issue, host

a talent workshop or talent bootcamp to make sure your local employers understand what talent needs to know when considering a location, and how to strategically market your location. To make sure everyone in their community was putting their best foot forward, Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership created key message pocket guides that include fast facts on lifestyle and cost of living so it's crystal clear how to talk to talent about the region. 📖



Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership created key message pocket guides that include fast facts on lifestyle and cost of living to help people know how to talk to talent about the region.