



CITY OF
GRAND
HAVEN

STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN



Background

The City of Grand Haven is one of Michigan's premier summer destinations and is well-known for its golden, sandy beaches, abundant water and annual Coast Guard Festival. Located in West Michigan along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, the region's year-round residential population is approximately 45,000 people but swells during the summer months with seasonal residents and vacationers. The area possesses a high quality of life with a multitude of hiking trails, multi-modal paths, parks, beaches, festivals and events, and community amenities such as a splash pad, public art, recreation leagues and a regional museum. Many of these assets were acquired through a combination of strong public and private partnerships and leadership by the philanthropic community.

The Grand Haven Public School System consistently ranks amongst the highest in the nation and the locally-owned hospital system, North Ottawa Community Hospital, is recognized as a leading health institution, as evidenced by its many awards and recognitions. In addition, the area features hundreds of successful local, national and international companies providing an array of career paths and competitive wages, all of which leads to a resilient year-round economy and tax base for the region.

The area boasts many accolades including, but not limited to:

- America's Happiest Seaside Town – *Coastal Living*
- Best Places in the World to Retire – *Conde Nast Traveler*
- The 12 Most Beautiful, Charming, Small Towns in Michigan – *Only In Your State*
- Best Freshwater Beach – *USA Today*
- Best Beach Town – *Thrillest*

Adding to the appeal of the area is Grand Haven's quaint, yet vibrant, Main Street, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There are also many specialty shops, locally-owned eateries and service businesses located in eclectic neighborhood commercial districts throughout the City of Grand Haven.

As a municipality, the City is a full service municipal organization operating under a home rule, Council-Manager form of government. Historically known as "Coast Guard City USA", Grand Haven City Council and its employees pride themselves on being a community that offers a high quality of life, exceptional customer service and dynamic delivery of services. With surrounding municipalities experiencing rapid growth over the past 50 years, Grand Haven has expressed interest in attracting appropriate infill development. Through strategic development and redevelopment, the City expects continued economic growth and opportunities for new residents to move into the City.

For Grand Haven to position itself for the rapid regional growth, the City is seeking to achieve Redevelopment Ready Certification to ensure development best practices are woven throughout the City's strategic planning and municipal services, including:

- Public Safety (Police & Fire)
- Streets, Transportation & Transit Infrastructure

- General Aviation Airport
- Commercial and Recreational Harbor
- Parks, Recreation Natural Areas & Cultural Facilities
- Community Development, Neighborhood & Planning services
- Utilities – Electric, Water, Wastewater & Storm water
- Support Services – Leadership, Human Resources, Information Technology, Communication, Financial Services, City Clerk’s Office, Facilities and Motorpool Services

Strategic Marketing Introduction

In an effort to capture redevelopment opportunities in the City of Grand Haven, the Grand Haven City Council and City Manager supported the City’s participation in the Michigan Economic Development Corporation’s Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program. The City has benefitted from its participation with RRC by receiving best practice recommendations from the RRC evaluation of its development programs and services for quality and efficiency.

The Grand Haven Strategic Marketing Plan has been crafted to create a framework and action plan for effectively promoting the City of Grand Haven’s services, community activities, events and other economic opportunities to current and potential community members, visitors, the business community, and investors with the objective of motivating them to:

- Support community events and happenings
- Live in the City of Grand Haven
- Participate in public meetings/activities
- Invest in the City of Grand Haven through development, redevelopment and job creation
- Support local businesses
- Share information about Grand Haven with their networks
- Comment and engage on all City social media platforms

The Strategic Marketing Plan outlines an organized way to communicate that will ensure the best marketing methods and accurate information will be disseminated on a timely and regular basis. The plan is intended to be an easy to follow roadmap for the variety of marketing tasks that need to be completed to further the City’s goals of:

- Attracting new business and investment to Grand Haven
- Driving more traffic and sales to Grand Haven businesses
- Increasing awareness of Grand Haven’s amenities, facilities and services
- Achieving regional and national media exposure for the City
- Garnering outside interest in visiting, living and/or doing business in Grand Haven
- Reinforcing Grand Haven’s brand
- Encouraging visits to the City’s website
- Increasing lines of communications with community partners
- Inspiring residents, businesses and visitors to become City of Grand Haven’s brand advocates

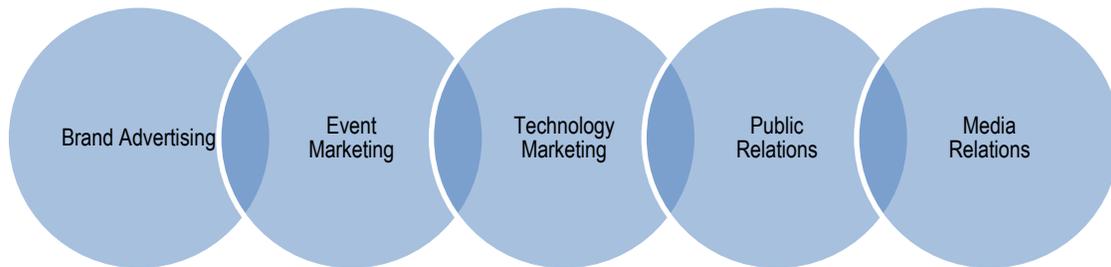
Target Audiences

- 1. Community Members**
 - Corporations
 - General community
 - Service/retail businesses
 - Community organizations
 - Property owners from outside the area
- 2. Investors** (local and non-local)
- 3. Neighboring Communities**
- 4. News Media** (GH Tribune, WGHN, MLive Media Group, Sentinel, Fox17, WoodTV8, WZZM, etc.)
- 5. Visitors** (Regional, National and International)

Marketing Responsibilities

The strategies outlined in the marketing plan will only be successful if the City is able to have shared responsibility between staff and appointed and elected officials in collaboration with its area partners. Success of the strategies outlined in the marketing plan will rest heavily on a combined effort of the City, Chamber of Commerce, Grand Haven Main Street, Convention and Visitor's Bureau and other local affiliate organizations. The goals of the Plan will only be met through a shared commitment to implement the strategies outlined below delivered to the target marketing audiences.

Marketing Channels



The following pages contain an outline of marketing channels, general content and success measures the City plans to utilize to execute the Strategic Marketing Plan and objectives previously outlined. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list as there may be other means of communicating that the City wishes to deploy which will be reviewed and may be added to the strategy.

This is a working document and revisions will be made as necessary as part of an annual business planning process, possibly in conjunction with City Council's annual goal setting session.

It is important to acknowledge that key influences within the marketing and promotions field will change regularly. Demographic makeups and consumption of information through technological advancements will influence service delivery and customer expectations in the future.

Through the Grand Haven Strategic Marketing Plan the following marketing channels will be used:



- Brand advertising
- Event marketing
- Technology marketing
- Public relations
- Media relations

Brand Advertising: Several years ago, the City completed their branding process. The execution of branding Grand Haven involves use of a consistent city logo, color and font. Branding is significant because it guarantees the City seek excellence in its mission to deliver quality public service. Branding enhances consumer confidence and certifies a public good has been thoroughly developed, inspected and vetted. Although the City has many partnerships with brand name organizations like the Chamber of Grand Haven, Spring Lake and Ferrysburg, the City will continue its efforts to establish a standalone community brand. The brand will seek to mirror the core community values expressed in the Master Plan and the City will continue to review opportunities to reinforce the brand. Opportunities may include, but will not be limited to, official City publications, City website/social media, City vehicles, presentations, wayfinding signage and more. Consistent branding helps legitimize the City's public service work and is recognizable to the public.

Event Marketing: Event marketing is a critical advertising and promotional tool designed to focus on face-to-face interaction via a live event, such as a sporting or social event, or to bring a product or service to the attention of the public. The City benefits from these types of events by reinforcing the City's brand, improving face-to-face communications, driving additional newsletter subscriptions, and creating opportunities to make new connections with residents and businesses.

For City hosted, co-hosted or sponsored events, the appropriate City department involved in the event will be required to work with the event organizers as soon as possible to develop strategies to maximize available funding to reach larger markets. In addition, the City shall seek to capitalize on opportunities to distribute marketing materials, i.e. stickers, informational flyers, pins, etc. at various community events.



If an organization or promoter solicits the City to partner or host an event, the City staff will meet with event organizers to determine a sponsorship package that leverages the City's investment in the event. To determine if the City will host/sponsor an event, clear requirements and screening processes are needed. To help fund City events, businesses within the City will be encouraged to assist with financial sponsorships or in-kind services/donations. Sponsorship is beneficial for both parties. Local businesses

that get involved in sponsoring a City event are expressing their belief in our future growth by their support. In turn, they will gain recognition as a partner with the City and profit from displaying their logo/marketing materials to community residents.

Special Event Database

The City will leverage its special events database to critically examine the execution of this strategy and the overall success of the plan. Over time the database will expand and become a critical point of information with all the relevant information to carry out the marketing or participation of the event. The event database will also include community meetings. This database will be beneficial to the City in delivering information to a wide audience regarding new programs, educating the public, requesting participation and/or marketing assistance. Using the event database, the City will be able to proactively identify which meetings and events they may want to participate in or support.

Success Measures

To ensure the Events Marketing program is contributing to City objectives, any combination of the following metrics will be used to measure the effectiveness of the event.

- **Cost per Contact** is generated by dividing the entire program investment by the gross number of contacts generated. This metric can be dangerous if used on its own to evaluate the value of the event. It is better to combine it with a metric like cost per lead. If left to stand on its own, the cost per contact metric can encourage questionable marketing practices that mistakenly focus on contact quantity instead of quality.
- **Cost per Lead:** Ranking the annual events calendar by cost per lead can serve as a benchmark for making future event-selection decisions.
- **Expense to Revenue Ratio** is generated by dividing the total revenue associated with the event by the total expense incurred. The benefit of using this metric is that it makes the relative cost of the marketing communications tactic easy to compare with other tactics of its sort.
- **Event Sales:** although the City does not often sell products at events, this metric should be used when the event calls for it. This may include a City booth that is selling T-shirts, hats, books, etc.
- **Engagement Tracking:** Before, during and after the event the City could track the feedback received or conversations surrounding the event through email, phone calls and social media comments.

Technology Marketing: Technology marketing can help the Community and Economic Development staff communicate to a much broader, world-wide audience of prospective visitors and employers. Because of its speed and efficiency, this method represents a very cost-effective strategy with near limitless potential to reach intended audiences. The most effective technology marketing strategies are those that result in a steady stream of targeted leads over time. Utilizing this marketing channel will produce website traffic, brand awareness, on-going connection to target audiences and encourage visitor and business relocations many years into the future. The Technology Marketing component will be executed utilizing the following tools:

Website: The City’s website should be utilized as a central location to provide information the City wants to convey to target audiences. While other social media platforms can and should be used to share information, the website provides a way to curate details and facts in an easy to view manner. Social media platforms like Facebook should be used to enhance how information is shared; not replace it as users are often left searching for valuable information.

Social Media: The City must put social media to work by means of actively using its social media strategic plan. The plan should be designed and implemented to achieve specific goals that support the overall marketing strategy. The plan must identify how each service will be managed, including the frequency of updates, who will be responsible for updates and what means will be used to report on the activities and how its effectiveness will be measured. Social networking sites provide a virtual community for people interested in a particular subject or looking to increase their circle of acquaintances. The City will continue to evolve its “profile” and share relevant information. The City can communicate with others by making their latest news and announcements public in a blog-like format or via e-mail, instant messaging, voice or videoconferencing to selected members. Social media platforms are adaptable to meet a variety of goals. They can assist the City by creating awareness, locating leads and prospects, generating discussion, building local business communities and increasing traffic to the City’s website.

Facebook - Facebook provides an opportunity for the City to have conversations with a variety of audiences, share photos of events and priority redevelopment sites, post reminders about meetings and events, acknowledge awards and keep in touch with the community. The City may want to consider using this platform to provide behind the scenes tours of sites and attractions.

Twitter - a social tool that allows for quick, short messages about current activities, events, awards, post reminders about meetings and keep in touch with the community. This platform provides an opportunity for the City to create messages that can be easily forwarded on amongst users.

YouTube - a video streaming service which allows subscribers to post/share video files with the public. The City can upload community event videos, City Council meetings, priority redevelopment site tours, behind the scenes sites and attractions on this popular site. The public can then share the files and comment on the videos.



LinkedIn- this website is a “high end” site like Facebook that is used primarily for business communication. Over 75 million

professionals use this website to exchange information, ideas and opportunities. The City can continually grow its network of business contacts and communicate with thousands at once. The City can also find talent for key positions within the organization.

Instagram – the City can utilize Instagram to share photographs of priority redevelopment sites, public meetings, community events, City hosted/sponsored events and to portray the quality of life that the City is so well known for to a broad audience.

Success Measures

Technology Marketing requires new approaches to developing marketing strategies and predicting results, which are very different from traditional advertising. Unlike other media, every impression on the Internet is logged and reach numbers are commonly reported. The City will measure effectiveness with click-through rate (CTR), conversion rate, unique visitor numbers and website traffic data provided by the back end of the City website as well as analytics from other sites the City is using. Regular tracking of this data will allow the City to evaluate the level of engagement through online sources.

Public Relations: Public relations have been performed for decades by the City staff. As with other strategies and activities that were assessed to prepare this plan, public relations activities had previously been performed informally without following a structured strategy shaped by standardized evaluation and measurement. Now that the City has identified target audiences, its brand and its desired messages, public relations may be one of its most strategic and effective tools in the arsenal of resources provided by this plan. In today's economy, collaboration is critical to community and economic development success. If the City effectively seeks and develops partnerships and collaborative ventures, it should result in measurable outcomes. Public Relations is about telling stories and bringing a place to life through those stories.

The goal of an effective public relations strategy is to make Grand Haven “real” by discovering and sharing its stories, especially human interest type stories. We will take a proactive approach to sharing Grand Haven's stories beginning with the City's quarterly publication – Harbor Lights! It is important that the City continuously reinforce its brand by spreading Grand Haven's story by word-of-mouth as well. Grand Haven's brand promise calls for a unique natural environment where residents can make a difference and achieve anything. Residents of Grand Haven also play a critical part in creating and delivering the message that Grand Haven is the place to be.

The City needs to encourage existing businesses throughout Grand Haven to share their stories, successes, and news announcements as a way for the City to generate stories of the community. Serving as an extension of other media channels, the City can help identify and share those stories. This effort will help position and promote Grand Haven as a business leader and effectively carry the City's brand forward to the target markets previously identified in the plan. An editorial calendar identifying strategic opportunities for Grand Haven is critical for the public relations component of the plan.

To carry out the public relations strategy, select City staff and partners will be provided with guidelines, training and tools (i.e. Council members, Community Affairs Manager, Community and Economic Development officials).

Success Measures

When it comes to Economic Development and Community Outreach, public relations is an essential component. Measurements need to be based against a contact database tracking system that may be integrated with the media relations database. Other ways to measure results include number of valuable contacts created and level of participation of the public relations activity.



Media Relations: Based on the City’s specified target audiences, key messages and “news pitch” ideas should be generated to engage with various media outlets. To disseminate these messages and stories the City will need to expand upon current media contacts and identify and develop a media database (print/online/video) that serves target audiences. Working with City staff, target markets will be matched with specialty media sources to provide additional mass media outreach with specific community features and news angles. With a robust social networking platform and a communication plan that includes bulletins, quarterly newsletters and video messaging, the City of Grand Haven serves as a primary news source by, for and about itself. An effective media relations campaign incorporates both functional and emotional messages, generates third-party endorsements, facilitates communication, and increases visibility. Media relations play an important role in City branding and offer Grand Haven an opportunity to connect with its current and prospective stakeholders. These story ideas will be based on several things:

- 1.) The public relations objective
- 2.) The strongest stories/news
- 3.) The media interest/category
- 4.) The editorial calendars/opportunities

Potential Media Tools

- Press Releases: City staff will regularly issue press releases of important decisions, events, project updates, and general information that will positively market the City of Grand Haven
- Banners and Advertising: The City may consider collaborating with local businesses to sponsor the purchase and display of community banners, renderings or posters for public events and dedication ceremonies. When doing so, the City will seek low-cost opportunities to market itself in various local publications on multi-media platforms.
- Open Houses/Question and Answer (Q&A): City officials and staff will be encouraged to stay informed on city projects to help answer any questions the community may have regarding specific

projects. Community engagement may range from informational booths, displays, social media, and Q&A sessions.

- Signage
- Market events, projects, news and other community happenings on the city's website, social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube), downtown kiosks and community buildings
- Media Tours: Media tours are used to allow the media to share an experience of a service, business or something new that is happening in Grand Haven.
- PowerPoint Presentation: The City may want to develop topic-specific presentations from time to time as necessary to deliver to news media and community organizations to help share information
- Collateral Materials: The City may want to develop issue driven marketing pieces to share information, market a City-sponsored/hosted event or address a topic that will reinforce the City's brand

Success Measures

There is no better validation than third party endorsement. Every time the City talks to a prospective media vendor – whether it is for paid or earned media, the goal should be to develop a rapport/relationship that is sustainable and will establish ongoing return on investment over time. These contacts should be tracked and documented for sake of accountability. If budget allows, a media clipping service will help determine hits/wins in real time, over time. The City should develop a regular method for tracking news stories that includes the publication/media source, date, title, topic, etc.

Media Contacts

As relationships and new media is created, the contacts on the media list may need to be added, redefined or modified. Constant upkeep of these records is vital to the success of the media relations component of this plan.

PRINT – Grand Haven Tribune, Grand Haven Visitors Guide, Grand Living, MLive Media Group, Harbor Lights Newsletter

RADIO – 92.1 WGHN, 103.5 WAWL

EXTERNAL – Loutit District Library, Downtown kiosks, City buildings, public restrooms, Grand Haven Area Public Schools publications, Harbor Transit buses, Chamber E-News/publications

ONLINE MEDIA – COGH website, COGH Facebook, COGH Twitter, COGH LinkedIn, COGH Instagram, COGH YouTube

Marketing of Redevelopment/Development Sites

The City has identified proactive marketing of redevelopment and development sites as a priority and as such has developed specific opportunities to support these efforts.

The City will retain transparent communication of available sites listed with real estate developers and brokers, local businesses and other organizations. Staff will notify developers and real estate brokers of

financial incentives to help market sites for potential redevelopment. Additionally, pertinent development information such as community statistics, qualitative, and quantitative data will be highlighted to inform and attract developers. A part of the City's proactive development effort will also include engaging with stakeholders potentially affected by each development/redevelopment.

The City will market redevelopment sites online with property information packages.

I. Staff will continue to update the redevelopment sites as development occurs or priority changes, and market sites on the City's website.

II. The City will place visual depictions of major projects within Grand Haven City Hall and/or Council Chambers, Grand Haven Community Center, schools or any combination of public places that will reach the public audience.

III. As projects are completed, dedication ceremonies shall be held to celebrate success. Partners at the State, local, county and sometimes necessary, federal level of government shall be invited to attend such celebratory events.

IV. The City and its partners will display signage and promotional material of community projects. Signage for projects that utilized funds and incentives such as grants, low interest loans, tax abatements, etc. should acknowledge support of those incentive programs.



Market Analysis

The City will collaborate with county, local and state officials for assistance in creating a market analysis. The purpose would provide analytical results of market needs in the City for specific businesses, customer needs, housing and spending patterns, to effectively promote redevelopment sites and provide valuable information to developers. The market analysis should include details indicating sufficient support or shortfalls in market demand. The City will utilize the analytics when discussing potential redevelopments with businesses and real estate developers and how it fits with the current planning and zoning regulations for the site.

Community Partnerships

In order for the Strategic Marketing Plan to be most impactful, the City of Grand Haven will need to collaborate and actively engage with current regional partners and form new partnerships. The City will continue to build relationships with community organizations, business community from all areas of the City, advertising agencies, business associations, local and regional schools, the Chamber of Commerce,

Visitors Bureau, Grand Haven Main Street and others to effectively promote doing business and living in Grand Haven.

One example is the City's active partnership with Grand Haven Area Public Schools (GHAPS). GHAPS helps promote city services, employee recruitment, community programming, and other special opportunities as they arise. With permission, the City is able to engage students on redevelopment projects, market community events and use school facilities for city functions. In turn, the City allows GHAPS to use public space for events, programs, and promoting events put on by the school. It is truly a win-win.

Another example is the unique partnership that exists between the City and Greater Ottawa County United Way. A new bond was formed when the two parties came together to begin tackling the issue of affordable housing in Ottawa County. As one of several partners, the United Way created [Ottawa Housing Next](#). This initiative has led to the formation of a local committee charged with studying housing trends and bringing forth-specific action steps to improve housing conditions.

Steps to expand existing community partnerships and foster new partnerships include:

- 1.) Identify the needs of existing and future partners.
- 2.) Assist if possible in finding ways to have their needs met.
- 3.) Meet with potential partners to explore and explain available city services.
- 4.) Present examples of mutually beneficial results stemming from the formation of long-lasting partnerships with the City.
- 5.) Engage and monitor partnerships for opportunities.
- 6.) Effectively and openly, communicate with stakeholders to minimize potential resistance to establishing a partnership.
- 7.) Plan or contract partnership responsibilities included with a method of dispute resolution.

Conclusion

The City of Grand Haven Strategic Marketing Plan provides a detailed description of the activities that would create a powerful marketing campaign for the City. The activities represent best practice recommendations based on knowledge of the market, the latest intelligence and trends in community-based marketing and professional experience, guided by insight from City staff. Activities will be prioritized according to potential impact and budget and will be updated to meet the changing needs of the City. The most significant aspect of this plan is the purposeful identification and synergy between audience, message and channel. The overall success of this plan will rely on the implementation and tracking of the activities. While implementing this plan, the City must be able to remain flexible to accommodate unforeseen changes or respond to actual marketing channel results. This Strategic Marketing Plan will take the City's marketing and advertising efforts to another level of professionalism and into a future that has unlimited possibilities. This plan will position Grand Haven as the City where you can Live for a Lifetime.