City of Ionia
Marketing Strategy

Introduction

The City of Ionia is the largest city and the county seat of Ionia County, Michigan. The City of Ionia is situated mostly within Ionia Township, with small portions extending into Easton Township and Berlin Township but remain politically autonomous of the townships.

Settlers arrived in 1833 determined to establish a good life in the Michigan heartland. They began a pattern of productivity and family values that continue today. Visual reminders of that period are the heritage homes – still beautiful, still a useful part of life in Ionia. One such historic mansion now houses the Community Library. A landmark of a different kind is the Ionia Theatre built in 1931. The facility is host to movies, stage performances, concerts, and theatrical presentations. With the addition of state of the art digital technology, the Ionia Theatre continues to be the entertainment anchor of the downtown providing first run movies and remains a leader in the industry.

Located in the Michigan heartland, Ionia residents have a variety of shopping options. The Main Street Business District provides an interesting mix of specialty shops and services, with most owned and operated by local residents. Fresh produce, flowers and plantings fill the Farmers' Market June through October.

Ionia is fortunate to be located where all kinds of sports and outdoor activities are close at hand. Six inland lakes surround Ionia and Lake Michigan is a pleasant drive away. From golf courses to campgrounds, all are close enough to be accessible and far enough away for relaxation. The area is host to a number of beautiful city parks, splash pad, Ionia State Recreational Area, Bertha Brock Park, and more.

Ionia provides a sampling of housing for all. There are little houses for small families, bigger homes for larger ones, heritage homes for the traditionalists and ranch styled homes built for comfort. Restored second and third floor apartments and lofts in the downtown offer the best of both worlds. Something for everyone – the young, retirees, and families.

Public education is not limited to K-12 in Ionia but continues to college level. Ionia provides a school system with virtual technology and special education features. Adult education classes and for credit college courses are available at the Heartlands Institute of Technology. The Ionia Free Fair has been host to a variety of attractions including concerts, auto racing, championship rodeos, sporting events and more. The Agri-Science Division boosts 4-H and Open entries and exhibits. Once noted as the world's largest free fair, it presents the best ten days of summer.

Here in Ionia, we hold proudly display our heritage. Ionia's blend of past, present and future, with its proximity to nature, culture and industry, makes it the perfect place to spend a day, a weekend or longer. Rich with history, neatly restored, and positioned for future growth, we think you will find Ionia a great place to visit and an even better place to live.

A note from Mayor Daniel A. Balice:

The City of Ionia has some of the most beautiful, historic building stock in the State of Michigan, has a renovated downtown business district which evokes memories of Ionia's historic past, has a modernized industrial center featuring light, medium, and heavy manufacturing, and has some of the friendliest citizens in America. I hope that you are able to take time to enjoy Ionia's scenic beauty, and to experience the variety and history of one of Michigan's best kept secrets. Ionia is nestled in the heart of the Grand River Valley, and is, as most people know, the home of Michigan's greatest outdoor event – the Ionia Free Fair. The history and scenic beauty of Ionia are unparalleled, from the beautiful County Courthouse and Community Library, which are both built of Ionia sandstone, to Ionia's red brick Main Street, Italianate homes, bike trails, park system, and the one-of-a-kind, fully restored Ionia Theatre, which is beautifully maintained in the Art Deco style and hosts over 100,000 people per year for first run movies, live shows, and meetings. Sparrow Ionia Hospital is a state of the art, critical access hospital, the Ionia Educational Center, public schools, and parochial schools provide an outstanding educational experience for Ionia's youth, and the Ionia Parks and Recreation Department has programs and activities for all ages, interests, and skill levels. In short, we often say in Ionia that we are "proud of our past and confident of our future," and I am certain that once you take the time to look us over and experience the many things that Ionia has to offer, you will understand why we take such great pride in our community.

Marketing Strategy Introduction

The Marketing Strategy for the City of Ionia will assist in promoting community assets during special events, within the municipal website and throughout Michigan as a tourist destination. In an effort to capture redevelopment opportunities in the community, the City Council, City Manager and Downtown Development Authority support the City's participation in the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program. The City has and will continue to benefit 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 City of Ionia Strategic Marketing Plan has been crafted to create a framework and action plan for effectively promoting the City of Ionia'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 Ionia
- Participate in public meetings / activities
- Invest in the City of Ionia through development, redevelopment and job creation
- Support local businesses
- Share information about Ionia with their networks
- Comment and engage on all City social media platforms in a positive manner

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 Ionia
- Driving more traffic and sales to Ionia businesses
- Increasing awareness of Ionia's amenities, facilities, and services
- Garnering outside interest in visiting, living and / or doing business in Ionia
- Encouraging visits to the City of Ionia website
- Increasing lines of communications with community partners
- Creating a brand awareness inspiring businesses, residents and visitors

Target Audiences

1. Community Members
   - Corporations
   - General community
   - Service / retail businesses
   - Community organizations
   - Property owners from outside the area
   - Area residents

2. Investors (local and non-local)
3. Neighboring Communities
4. News Media (Ionia Sentinel Standard, Greenville Daily News, Ionia County Shoppers Guide, 1430 WION Radio, MLive Media Group, FOX 17, FOX 47, Wood TV 8, etc.)
5. Visitors (regional and national)

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 / elected officials in collaboration with its area partners. Success of the strategies outlined in the marketing plan will rest heavily on the combined effort of the City, Chamber of Commerce, Ionia DDA and other local affiliate organizations. The goal 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

- Brand Advertising
- Event Marketing
- Technology Marketing
- Public Relations
- Media Relations

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. This is a working document and revisions will be made as necessary as a part of an annual business planning process. 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 City of Ionia Strategic Marketing Plan the following marketing channels will be used:

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

1. Brand Advertising

The execution of the branding consists of the 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 Commerce, Ionia DDA, and the Ionia Free Fair, 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. For the official City colors and approved logo styles used in consistent brand advertising see the image below.
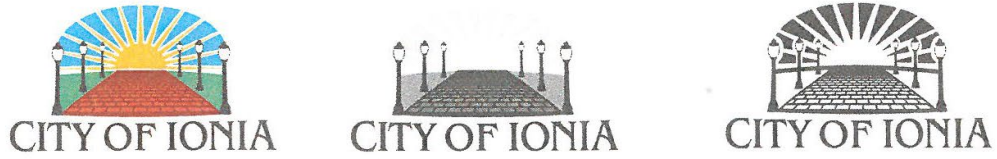
2. Event Marketing

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 newsletters, 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, etc. at various community events.

If an organizer or promoter solicits the City to partner or host an event, the City staff shall meet with the 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 area 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 of the relevant information to carry out the marketing of 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. Using the event database, the City will be able to proactively identify which meetings and events they may want to participate 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 generating 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 communication 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 should track the feedback received or conversations surrounding the event through email, phone calls, and social media comments.

3. **Technology Marketing**

Technology marketing can help the Economic Development staff communicate to a much broader, national 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 provide website traffic, brand awareness, on-going connection to target audiences and encourage visitor and business relocations many years in 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 to replace it as users are often left searching for valuable information.

- Social Media: The City may 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 the updates, who will be responsible for updates and what means 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 email, 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. The City of Ionia's future considerations may include:
    - 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 the opportunity for the City to create messages that can be easily forwarded on amongst users.

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, conversion rate, unique visitor numbers, and website traffic data 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 services.

4. Public Relations

Public relations have been performed for decades by City staff itself. 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 shared 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 Ionia "real" by discovering and sharing its stories, especially human interest type stories. We will take a proactive approach to sharing Ionia's stories through the medium of art in the creation of a set of murals.

The City needs to encourage existing businesses throughout Ionia 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 provide Ionia as a business leader and effectively carry the City's brand forward to the target markets previously identified in the plan.

5. Media Relations

Based on the City's specified target audiences, key messages and new 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 the target audiences. Working with City staff, target markets will be matched with specially media sources to provide additional mass media outreach with specific community features and news angles. With a robust social media networking platform and a communication plan that includes bulletins, newsletters, website updates and more, the City of Ionia serves 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 Ionia an opportunity to connect with its current and prospective stakeholders.

These story ideas will be based on several things:

- The public relations objective
- The strongest stories / news
- The media interest / category
- 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 Ionia.
- 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 website, social media, downtown and community outlets

Success Measures:

There is no better validation than third party endorsement. Every time the City talks to a prospective media vendor – whether it is 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. 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 news 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 – Ionia Sentinel Standard, Greenville Daily News, Ionia County Shoppers Guide, newsletters
- Radio – 1430 WION Radio
- External – Ionia Community Library, Chamber of Commerce, Ionia DDA, newsletters, Ionia County Historical Society, Ionia Public Schools, Ionia County Administration
- Online Media – City of Ionia website, DDA Newsletters

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.

- Staff will continue to update the redevelopment sites as development occurs or priority changes, and market sites on the City's website.
- 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.
- 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 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 the market demand. The City will utilize 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 Ionia 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 county, advertising agencies, business associations, local and regional schools, the Chamber of Commerce, DDA, and others to effectively promote doing business and living in Ionia.

Community Assets

The City of Ionia's community assets can be reasonably categorized into natural resources, family-friendliness, inclusive economic development, pedestrian-oriented design, placemaking, and historic preservation. The assets listed below define the character of Ionia and residents that call it home.

Natural Resources	Family-Friendly	Inclusive Economic Development	Pedestrian-Oriented Design	Placemaking	Historic Preservation
Grand River	Parks	Manufacturing and Industry	Downtown	Ionia Free Fair Fairgrounds	Historic Downtown
Street Tree Program	Walkability	Incentives	Sidewalks	Annual Events	Charm
Trails	Parades	Ionia Harvest Market	Parks	Parades	Historic Archives
Fishing	Small Town	Small Business	Fred Thwaites Grand River Trail	Parks and Recreation Programming	Ionia County Historical Society
River Access	Annual Events	Affordable	Fred Meijer Grand River Valley Rail Trail	Volunteer Opportunities	City Buildings
Recreational Programming	Community Center	Central Business District	Downtown Residential	Ionia Theatre	Main Street Brick Road