



City of
Sandusky
MICHIGAN

Strategic Communications Plan

Prepared for
City of Sandusky, MI

July 2017



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The Rising Tide project supports vibrant, thriving communities to attract business investment and talent by creating a sustainable path toward economic stability and growth. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Talent Investment Agency, and Michigan State Housing Development Authority—collectively, the Talent and Economic Development (TED) team—have committed their assets to engaging specific communities across the state in order to empower them to shape their future and maximize economic potential. This document was produced as part of that effort.



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July 2017

City of Sandusky
City Council Members
26 West Speaker Street
Sandusky, MI 48471

Dear City of Sandusky City Council Members:

On behalf of the Project Rising Tide Team, Place & Main Advisors, LLC, is pleased to present you with this Strategic Communications Plan for the City of Sandusky. The plan is part of the organization's participation in Project Rising Tide and is provided for by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

This plan details the steps necessary for the City of Sandusky to tell the story of the community, share good news with residents, visitors and media alike. The plan details specific steps to sharing the stories, templates for the ease of sharing news, documents for keeping the community's communications organized, as well as a detailed media list. In the end, we are confident in the plan we have put forth and the community's ability to execute it.

Thank you for the opportunity for our firm to work with you.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Borgstrom, Principal

I. Overview



I. Overview

Developing and implementing the following steps of the communications plan will assist the City of Sandusky to focus on the message, reach the identified target audiences as well as influence the efficiency and simplicity of the communications.

City of Sandusky Overview:

The City of Sandusky is the county seat of Sanilac County, in the heart of ‘the Thumb’ of Michigan’s Southeast lower peninsula. The City of Sandusky is served by M-46 running through the heart of downtown and connecting the community to Saginaw to the west and Lake Huron to the east. The city has a historic downtown core as well as more commercial development on the outskirts of town. The community is served by a City-owned airport and McKenzie Memorial Hospital, a 25-bed general surgical and medical health care facility.

Primary Messaging:

Mission-based:

The City of Sandusky looks to continue the long history of steady and innovative economic growth with mix of available prime commercial, industrial, and residential property locations accompanied by a highly skilled labor force. Farming and industry combine to make Sandusky an honest, hard working, progressive and safe community.

Location-based:

Situated in the Thumb Area of Michigan’s mitten, Sandusky offers small town friendliness and integrity coupled with larger city conveniences. From hometown festivals and events to outdoor recreation, family-friendly activities are abundant in Sandusky.

II. Communications Goals & Objectives

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The goals and objectives set below are a reminder of what and why we need to communicate with the audience. These goals and objectives should be reviewed on an annual basis to make sure they reflect the goals and objectives of the overall organization.

1. Brand the City of Sandusky as a place of economic opportunity, offering small town feel and integrity with the conveniences of a larger city.
2. Build community pride and unity by utilizing the new brand / logos for the different segments of the community including city, tourism, and events.
3. Increase awareness of the quality of life Sandusky offers including abundant recreational opportunities for the whole family.
4. Create awareness of the hard working, honest, and dependable workforce available to existing and new businesses in the area.
5. Outline strategy and support for media platforms, including traditional and social media, as communications methods.

III. Materials



III. Media Materials

The following identifies a few of the most common media materials, including how and when to use these materials, to share information with the media. Templates for these materials have been provided.

Press Releases

Write the press release as if writing the actual article about the topic at hand. Include as much of the ‘who, what, where, when, and how’ in the opening paragraph. A quote by the appropriate spokesperson, additional background information as necessary as well as a call to action on how or where to obtain additional information should also be included in the release.

Timing / Tips:

- The press release should be cut and pasted into the body of an email, not sent as an attachment. Let the journalists/new outlets know if you have photos available but do not attach them. It is best to use a file sharing system (We Transfer, DropBox, YouSendIt) and send a link as most outlets will require high resolution images (300 dpi @ 4x6).
- If sending a press release to a group of journalists, send it to yourself and bcc the journalists, or use an email service such as MailChimp to send to everyone at once without each email address being visible in the ‘to’ line. MailChimp is a free service that will help organize distribution lists including media and other external lists.
- Event press releases should be sent out 4-6 weeks prior to the event date. Use a media alert as a reminder as it gets closer to the event.
- It is best to send press releases out in the morning (after 9am), however if it is necessary to distribute in the afternoon do so prior to 4pm to give journalists enough time to review and take action if necessary.
- Press releases should not be distributed over the weekend.
- Avoid sending out a release the day before a holiday or long weekend, unless it is related to the holiday.
- Make sure to include contact information on the release, including the best way to get ahold of the contact should the media outlet have questions.

Media Alerts

Media Alerts are a great communications tool with the media for announcements and/or upcoming events, serving as an invitation to an event such as a press conference, grand opening, check presentation, etc. The alert is a concise at-a-glance summary of the event.

Timing / Tips:

- A media alert is usually sent out twice, once a few weeks prior to the event, and again a day or so before the event to serve as a reminder.
- The media alert should be cut and pasted into the body of the email, not sent as an attachment.

IV. Media Lists



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The media list file includes many tabs, across the bottom, with lists of media who may be interested in hearing about projects and happenings in Sandusky. The tabs in the media list file include business writers, travel and outdoor writers, radio, television, and print.

Given that social media has become another way to tell your story, in addition to listing the media contacts on each of the tabs links to Facebook profiles and Twitter handles, where applicable, have been included. As you grown your social media efforts make sure to 'like' and 'follow' these folks as many use these non-traditional media outlets as a source of gathering story ideas.

Business Writers

These are the journalists writing about a variety of business topics in the Thumb Area of Michigan. On the 'contact topic' column it shows what types of stories each contact tends to be interested in. Also, included area business writers who cover statewide topics including economic development, as well as business contacts in the other major media markets across Michigan. The intent is not to send every release to every contact but rather to those who would be interested in receiving the information. For example, do not send a ribbon cutting announcement release to the Grand Rapids Business Journal unless the ribbon cutting is a Grand Rapids based company expanding and/or relocating to Sandusky.

Travel / Outdoor Writers

The writers included in the travel and outdoor tab include many Michigan-based journalists who cover various aspects of travel and outdoor recreation. Look to the 'contact topics' column to see what type of information the journalist is interested in, as well as the 'outlet topics' to see what the outlet covers.

Radio

The radio tab includes many of the Thumb Area of Michigan based radio stations who have a news director covering local news on a daily basis. Share local news updates with these contacts. Also included are a few radio stations and programs covering statewide business. Use these contacts to share major announcements and/or milestone anniversaries.

Television

The television tab includes all of the television stations throughout the state. It is likely you will share more information with the local stations and less with the West Michigan stations. In addition, this complete list is a great resource for social media. These are the media outlets to follow.

Daily Newspapers

This tab includes the list of daily newspapers throughout the state. This was included more as a resource, along with an opportunity to follow many of these media outlets on social media rather than proactively sharing story idea or press releases.

Note: *There will be times where media will ask to be removed from your distribution. Do not take offense to this. Acknowledge the message has been received, remove the contact from your media list and move on. This does happen when a journalist changes what they write about or if they feel the information they are receiving is not timely or on topic.*

V. Social Media



V. Social Media

Social media brings together the latest news and trends, along with offering a means to network. Social media can, and should, be used as a communications tool with both internal and external audiences. Use social media outlets to share the stories of what is happening in Sandusky with current and potential residents, business owners, visitors, and media alike. Here are some best practices for using social media:

General Social Media Tips:

- Treat the page as an ongoing conversation. The most successful Facebook pages rely on 2-way interaction with their fans.
- Pay attention to what works and what doesn't, and adjust content and frequency based on results. Keep a spreadsheet with the following info to see what kind of content, posting schedule generates responses:
 - o Date
 - o Time
 - o Post Content (actual text of the post, and indicate if a photo/link/video was included)
 - o Comments
 - o Likes
 - o Feedback Sentiment (mostly positive comments, any complaints, etc)
- Be cognizant of spelling and grammar. While occasional typos are common and forgiven easily, consistently poor writing skills can have a detrimental effect on brand perception.
- Manage your posts efficiently. If there are 3 posts planned for the week, DO NOT post them one after another all on the same day. It is not an acceptable practice and not appreciated by fans.
- Be selective of the photos posted. 10 photos that capture the essence of the event are better than 100 that cover every little thing. Fans won't typically have the patience to pour through large photo albums.
- Additional resources including Social Media Informational Guides for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Blogging and more can be found online in the MEDC / Pure Michigan Social Media Learning Library (Michigan.org/industry/social-media-learning-library).

Social Media – Facebook

- Keep content going throughout the year, a minimum of one post per week. Ramp up to 2 or 3 posts per week during peak seasons, prior to events and / or as news is happening.
- Do not post 2-3 consecutively. Be sure to have space between morning and afternoon or on different days.
- Create awareness of Sandusky, the potential economic opportunities, and quality of life by creating an ongoing stream of content, such as:
 - o Area history / trivia
 - o Job Openings
 - o New Business Announcements / Ribbon Cuttings
 - o Awards and Accolades
 - o Press Coverage
 - o Events
 - o Seasonal Activities
 - o Lodging / Dining Specials or Options
 - o Shopping Experiences
- Use consistent posting to solicit participation from your fans. Ask questions about each of the above topics, encourage fans to post their own pictures, etc.
- Be sure to thank users for their participation, and respond to questions.
- Add relevant news outlets, local businesses, hotels, restaurants, and other community organizations to 'Favorite Pages.' Visit these pages, and comment on their walls to build relationships throughout the year.

Social Media – Event Specific

- Pre-Event:
 - o Establish a posting schedule. This schedule is meant to act as a loose guideline, not a hard and fast rule. Having it will help keep staff and volunteers on track, and set expectations for fans of the page. The schedule should include:
 - Who will post event news and updates
 - What they will post
 - Who will respond to questions, etc (this should be someone with intimate knowledge of the event)
 - Frequency and time of day of posts

- Add your social media icons to event promotional materials including websites. Consider adding the Facebook widget to the site as well, which allows users to ‘Like’ the page and/or event directly from the site.
- Include social media links in all press releases and media interviews
- **During Event:**
 - Focus heavily on photos. Photos inspire more interaction. Encourage fans to share their own photos as well. Snap mobile photos to share immediately, and higher resolution photos to share later.
 - Tag people who are fans of your page in the photos.
 - Solicit fans to find out what they want to see pictures of and fulfill their requests in a timely fashion.
 - Share information on weather, parking, restaurants, etc, and encourage fans to share their own tips.
- **Post Event:**
 - Share any additional photos.
 - Make sure to say thank you to consumers for attending the event, volunteers for helping with the event, and sponsors for contributing to the event.
 - Ask fans to share their favorite photo and/or memory of the event.

VI. Appendix

