West Branch
I-75 Business Corridor
Marketing Plan

October, 2014
(Revised December, 2014)

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LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
& PLANNERS, INC.
2014-2015 West Branch I-75 Business Corridor Marketing Plan

Submitted by Strategic Partners

October, 2014 (Revised December, 2014)

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Denny Turow, West Branch Township Downtown Development Authority
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Introductory Marketing Meeting

On December 6, 2013 an initial marketing committee meeting was held at the West Branch Michigan Works Office. Attendees were: Tom Youatt, Denny Turow, Heather Johnson, Robert Dack, Mandi Chasey, Yvonne DeRoso, Don Hamilton, Bob Ford, and Tom McConnell.
Several topics were on the agenda. One of the most important tasks was to define what the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of the I-75 Corridor was, and to agree on the importance of creating a supporting brand for that positioning statement. The creation of this brand would serve as step one in the marketing process. It would function as an icon that the many organizations and community members could rally around. The brand would reflect the community corridor, the positioning statement would support the brand, and both would work in concert to entice potential visitors to come to the area.

A marketing message used in the recent past was “The Victorian City.” This led to a discussion of brand equity. Even though this message applied directly to only one stakeholder in this marketing process (the City of West Branch), everyone else felt it fit well with describing the entire area. The visual experience of traveling the corridor includes many Victorian homes, and many businesses have been using the theme for years. Rather than try to rally everyone around an entirely new theme, it was decided that some configuration of the phrase “Victorian” would be unique to West Branch.

After reviewing a list of possible positioning statements, one was chosen that members felt would apply to the entire I-75 corridor and could be easily adopted by businesses as well as be inviting to visitors: to “Discover Victorian.” The positioning statement would be incorporated into the brand/logo design to support the overall theme.

A series of logo designs was presented at subsequent meetings, and the Committee stakeholders chose elements of each logo they liked. A final round of logo designs was presented, and from that group a final version was created. The final logo was presented to and accepted by the committee.
Also as part of the process, an inventory was taken of all of the positive reasons why visitors should take the time to visit and experience the area, the downtown, and the entire corridor before continuing on their journey. These attributes and assets served as the foundation upon which a marketing campaign was created. The act of doing a verbal inventory of these unique qualities defined the strengths (and weaknesses) of the area’s offerings for potential visitors and new residents, as well as for possible new business entrepreneurs.

The committee also identified the target audiences of this marketing effort:

- Travelers on I-75 (both directions)
- Shoppers coming to Tanger Outlet
- Victorian theme enthusiasts

**INITIAL DISCOVERIES**

The committee identified a list of the unique attributes and opportunities in the downtown and surrounding areas:

- The Railroad Depot
- The historical significance of being the gateway to Northern Michigan
- Significant crop farming in the area including dairy, soybeans, and sugar beets, corn, wheat & hay
- Recreational activities including golf, hunting, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, fly fishing, camping, and kayaking on the Rifle River
- A historical marker at Ogema Springs (there are natural springs everywhere in the County)
- The Victorian theme and streetscape downtown
- Fabulous Fridays with a different theme every Friday
- Ogemaw Hills Bike Week (10,000 attendance in past, now about half)
- Ogemaw County Fair (52,000 attendance in August)
- A new downtown pocket park on the main street with fountain and restrooms
Irons Park – Pavilion, Playscape, Flowing well, Basketball and Tennis courts, and Riverwalk Trail
Victorian Art Fair in August
Fireworks displays
Annual Business Expo
Nature Trail “Pathway”
Frisbie Golf
Ogemaw Hills Recreation Center
Wilco and Ball Fields and Field of Dreams

Committee members described West Branch as generally having a slower, laid-back pace, with friendly residents. The Committee also felt that the benefits of being located so close to a major corridor I-75 have yet to fully materialize. There is plenty of work yet to be done to bring a higher percentage of shoppers off I-75 and onto the business loop and into downtown. Everyone recognizes the potential impact this can have on the entire area.

Other Annual Community Events and Activities

Annual Frosty Invitational Gold Outing – February
Shivering Shamrock Challenge 3K Walk/Run – March
Maple Syrup Festival and Craft Show – April
Victoria Days Weekend Sidewalk Sales - May
Art and Wine Walks - May
The West Branch City-Wide Garage Sale – June
Sunrise Creations Summer Art Show – June
Annual Heritage Art Sale – June
July 4th Parade and Fireworks
Bike Week - July
Pioneer Power Club Antique Tractor and Flea Market - July
Farmers Market – Saturdays in summer
Summer Music Series – Thursdays in summer
Car and Craft Show to benefit Ogemaw Nature Park – August
Victorian Art Fair - August
Red Hat Day – September – West Branch Creative Art Association
Souls for Cardio 5K run/walk – September
Northern Michigan Lamb and Wool Show - September
Christmas Parade
Christmas Fantasy

THE CURRENT SITUATION

After the construction of Interstate Highway I-75 and the business loop that passes through West Branch Township, the City of West Branch, and Ogemaw Township, a primary focus for these communities became the development of the business loop. In the 1970’s, an informal association, the Loop Group, was organized to develop the business loop passing through West Branch Township, the City of West Branch, and Ogemaw Township. Throughout the years, the individual communities prepared plans that included elements to promote the development of commercial activities along this corridor.

In 2006-7, the Growth Assessment Planners, a group of officials and other interested parties from West Branch Township, the City of West Branch, and Ogemaw Township produced the West Branch Community I-75 Business Loop Market Strategy (February, 2007). This was a comprehensive plan including goals and recommendations for the historic restoration of downtown West Branch buildings and other features, for continuation and expansion of the city’s Victorian theme, traditional downtown and beautification features along the entire loop, and to market and improve the area’s Victorian identity by installing gateway and wayfinding signs. The plan also had a goal to increase the number of visitors to businesses along the entire loop by improving signage along the route and creating a “Businesses of the Business Loop website.”
In addition, Crescent Consulting, Inc. produced a “City of West Branch Master Plan” (adopted September 2009) in association with the City of West Branch Planning Commission. This document described in detail the community characteristics, natural features, evaluated the current land use and proposed a series of goals for the community. These goals included encouraging growth of businesses and community activities, continuing to develop support of a Victorian theme in the business community, promoting stronger participation in the Michigan Historic Markers program, and being more proactive in marketing the City to tourists.

As a result of these two studies, a variety of streetscape improvements have been completed, including new streetlights and a pedestrian/bicycle pathway. The West Branch Township D.D.A. has planted new trees along the corridor. The City of West Branch has embraced the Victorian theme and a number of events including the farmers market, the annual Heritage Days, and the Victorian Street Fair have been created to attract area locals and tourists. Many of the local businesses along the corridor have also embraced “Victorian” and incorporated it into their storefronts or names. The Committee discussed the importance of trying to persuade both businesses and homeowners to adopt the Victorian theme and incorporate it into future architectural designs in order to enhance the visual experience of visitors. The effort has been met with limited success.

The development of the Tanger Outlet Mall, along with a plethora of fast food franchises and new motels, put exit 212 on the map. All this development now attracts travelers to the business loop exit. The City of West Branch and Ogemaw Township have endeavored to capitalize on this traffic by attempting to draw these travelers to visit the businesses in the downtown area and then return through Ogemaw Township to exit 215 and re-enter Highway I-75.

Unfortunately, even though the Tanger Outlet Mall is a great destination for downstate travelers and many thousands stop there every year, a very small percentage of these travelers are aware there is a downtown West Branch. They do not realize that there is a variety of very unique, fun, colorful, and intriguing reasons to continue down the corridor
into town. West Branch and Ogemaw Township are not realizing the benefit of having such a great asset just a few miles away from local businesses. Everyone agrees that this Strategic Marketing Plan is step one in capturing the attention of these travelers and pointing them down the road to town and beyond, to *Discover Victorian*.

According to 2012 MDOT traffic counts, approximately 7,800 cars enter West Branch daily. However, according to the same data, 10,800 cars use the Tanger Outlet Mall exit daily. We can only assume that these people are shoppers. The need for a campaign to draw a larger percentage of these visitors downtown and along the corridor is obvious. Signage at both the south and north exits of I-75 is crucial to this effort. West Branch is a good relief break in the drive north from the urban communities and south from the Upper Peninsula, and we need to capture the attention of those travelers and direct them onto the corridor.

Committee members agree there is too much signage at the Tanger Outlet exit. The overwhelming plethora of signs can only confuse and distract visitors from continuing down the corridor. An analysis of existing signage and locations has been done by Strategic Partners to recommend the improvements needed to more effectively refocus travelers’ attention from the mall to downtown West Branch, and beyond. The Committee also believes that the corridor needs an “anchor” business at the Ogemaw Township exit. This has been recommended in previous studies and remains a critical need. A major franchise motel at exit 215 could also pull visitors toward downtown with the implementation of improved wayfinding signage at its entrance and exit.

The Committee also discussed several areas of concerns and challenges:

- Unemployment is high.
- The area is losing doctors and recruiting new doctors is difficult.
- Quality housing is lacking for working middle class families.
- There is a significant poverty.
- The area has an aging population.
- School enrollment is declining (true throughout Michigan).
MAJOR ASSETS

Business Assets:
Tanger Outlet Mall
West Branch Regional Medical Center
New Consumers Energy building at the Ogemaw Township exit
The Downtown Shopping District enjoys a variety of unique stores and restaurants
A Movie Theatre (West Branch Cinema) that shows recent releases

Michigan Historical Markers:
There are presently five Michigan Historical Markers in Ogemaw County: Ogemaw Springs, Cleveland Park Pavilion, The Big Fire (Rose City), Rose Township District No. 5 School and the Frank Sebastian Smith House (West Branch). Additions to this list are highly recommended. It should also be noted that there are no National Register of Historic Places sites in Ogemaw County at this time.

Recreation/Outdoor Assets:
Ogemaw Hills Pathway is located north of West Branch at the corner of Fairview and Clear Lake Roads. The trails provide groomed cross country skiing for all skill levels and wind through approximately 15 miles of the AuSable State Forest. In the summer the trails are becoming increasingly more popular for mountain biking and hiking. A pass is required to use the trail, and maintenance and grooming is funded through private donations.

Irons Park is a municipal park located just south of downtown West Branch. Park amenities include a modern playscape for children, shelters for picnics or weddings, tennis & basketball courts. The five mile long River Trail runs throughout the park and connects it to the downtown area. The park provides a central location for many civic and
cultural events that take place throughout the summer and sledding and ice skating in the winter.

Huron National Forest – 18,000 acres of the Forest are located in Ogemaw County offering a variety of recreational opportunities.

Ambrose Lake State Forest Campground is located 11 miles north of West Branch. It has 19 modern campsites and fishing for pan fish and bass.

Rifle River Recreational Area is located 25 miles northeast of West Branch and just east of Rose City. It boasts a total of 159 campsites, a mixture of modern, rustic, and 5 rustic cabins for daily rental.

Five excellent eighteen hole golf courses are located in the immediate area: The Dream, The Nightmare, Green Briar, Apple Valley, and the West Branch Country Club (which is open to the public).

There are several camping facilities in the County including these near West Branch:
- Beaver Trail Campgrounds – 4408 Grass Lake, West Branch
- Loranger Pines RV Park – 1700 Crawford Lane, West Branch
- West Branch RV Park – 2370 South M-76, West Branch
- Troll Landing Inc. – 2660 Rifle River Trail, West Branch

The Ogemaw County Genealogical and Historical Society has established four different driving tours to familiarize visitors with the area: First People- An Ancient Journey, Ghost Towns and Legends, Architectural Jewels of Ogemaw County, and Barons, and Bosses and Scoundrels. The Society has published a series of books that provide driving directions and the historical information of each location. They can be purchased at the Historical Society, the West Branch Area Chamber of Commerce office and many retailers in West Branch.
THE MARKETING PLAN

This Strategic Marketing Plan includes recommendations for activities that will impact the corridor such as directional and wayfinding signage, a billboard advertising campaign, videos created for YouTube, websites, television advertising, press releases for statewide newspapers and travel magazines, and feature articles on the area.

Research, Analysis, and Preliminary Campaign Concepts

Valuable input was gathered from Committee members and other interested parties to provide the recommendations for marketing West Branch. The elements of the plan are based upon analysis of the circumstances of the I-75 Business Corridor and agreement on objectives put forth by the marketing committee. Recommendations for specific marketing activities, along with specific costs, will be proposed and reviewed with the committee for their input. These planned activities are broken down into annual segments so each can be implemented with existing resources. Uncompleted activities can be pushed into the following year to enable accumulating the financial resources necessary to carry them out. The marketing plan is a series of integrated components that function to support each other in order to elevate the awareness of West Branch and the Victorian assets of the entire area to potential visitors and shoppers.

Wayfinding Signage Campaign

Strategic Partners has presented the wayfinding system developed for the West Branch area. Final decisions were made on the possible variations of color combinations and styles, and the locations of the initial signs were prioritized.

The corridor from exit 212 to 215 on Business I-75/M55 has been adopted as the center of the wayfinding efforts for the partnership of the West Branch Township Downtown Development Authority, the City of West Branch and the Ogemaw Township Downtown
Development Authority. The corridor consists of two primary business districts: Downtown West Branch, which emphasizes the Victorian theme, and the commercial area just off exit 212 which contains the Tanger Outlet Mall. The area within Ogemaw Township between exit 215 and the City of West Branch has the potential to become a third, complementary district, which the committee has unofficially called the “Ogemaw Springs” area.

The goal of the wayfinding system is to capture a portion of the traffic along I-75 north and south, as well as the exiting traffic visiting the Tanger Outlet Mall into the Downtown and travelers exiting from the north at the 215 Interchange through the Ogemaw Springs area. While Tanger has a high visitor rate, the Downtown does not see a significant portion of Tanger’s traffic. There is no desire to compete with Tanger, but there is a desire to make people who are at Tanger aware that something significantly interesting is just up the highway where they could spend more time discovering unique shopping, dining in a variety of restaurants, or just relaxing in one of the area parks. The goal is to make the Tanger and Downtown areas work in unison to generate economic activity throughout a broader region.

Meanwhile, people who live and do business in West Branch also have a need for effective wayfinding signs. Some civic amenities such as town halls, parks and public parking have limited signage, making it confusing for new people and local residents (many of whom do not know where the city parking lots are). Improving signage for these facilities will help facilitate everyday business activities.

The wayfinding system for the West Branch Area has been designed as a linear network. The major concentration of activity in the area is within a mile of the I-75 Business Route, making it the logical focal point of the signage system. The signage system directs traffic from this spine, to locations residing close to the corridor. It follows relatively simple routing patterns—most locations require only a single turn to get to them. The number of locations that are more than a two mile radius beyond the corridor is limited to significant area attractions (such as the county fairgrounds).
Several layers of signage are designed in response to the apparent needs of the area. These layers include vehicular signage, parking signage, pedestrian signage, and hanging banners. The layers also operate on different scales with different size signs. Together, they constitute a comprehensive system that facilitates logical and easy navigation during the entire time of a person’s trip.

Examples of the various signs are shown below and the location of each proposed sign and the design standards of each sign type are outlined in the wayfinding design package.
Highway Billboard Campaign

The most efficient way to reach out and connect with travelers is to place billboards on I-75, many miles north and south of West Branch to raise awareness levels and encourage them to see what unique assets the West Branch area has to offer. Millions of people pass by West Branch every year on this very important main corridor. This incredibly high traffic volume is a huge asset to engage as part of the community marketing strategy. Businesses along the entire corridor will benefit from the increased volume of shoppers.

Billboard placements will serve two major purposes: to bring a new awareness of “Discover Victorian” theme and to reach out and invite visitors into the area. This campaign will also serve to raise awareness of West Branch’s amenities with everyday commuter traffic in the region. Most vacation travel is planned in advance, so we want West Branch to be on their list of places to stop and visit while traveling both north and south.

Billboards designs will be developed for this phase of the marketing campaign. Wording on the boards will be critical: simple, short, easy-to-read, intriguing messages. Phase II will begin research of location availabilities and prioritize the placement options available (as these can change throughout the year). No matter which exit travelers take, we want to intrigue and motivate them to follow the new wayfinding signage to the downtown area where they can find fascinating historical assets, unique shops, great dining experiences, events, and easy access to recreational opportunities.

Example of a possible designs are shown here:
Victorian Festival Recommendations

As part of the plan, the consultants brainstormed possible supporting elements in the form of an event that would draw new visitors to West Branch from all around the State and the Midwest. This event would establish West Branch’s identity as a unique community that is known for a specific theme. This identity will resonate with followers of the Victorian Era and give them a reason to make West Branch a destination to be visited year after year, and not just a “gateway” on the route to a destination elsewhere. It has the power to draw visitors not only down the corridor from the Tanger Outlet Mall, but from other parts of the State.
Over the next five years, we recommend establishing some or all of the following events as part of a one week long *Victorian Festival*. Some of the events on this list already exist or have been held in the recent past but are no longer happening. This new list of events includes (but is not limited to):

- Beer, ale & cocktail festival & wineries
- Antique dealer show with hundreds of booths
- Hot air balloon festival
- Victorian reenactments & theatre
- Victorian fashion show
- Antique bicycle race including a high wheeler race
- Antique bicycle show and swap meet
- Restored antique buggy show
- Equestrian dressage performance
- Draft horse show
- Harness racing
- Antique horse drawn farm implements
- Antique logging equipment from the 1890’s
- Victorian arts & crafts fair
- Seminars on Charlotte Bronte, Charles Dickens, and the Victorian Era by scholars
- Plein air painting exhibition and competition
- Outdoor or indoor music concert
- Film Festival with Victorian subject matter
- Grand Finale Parade with participants from all the various events

This weeklong Festival will make visiting West Branch an educational and cultural experience for people of all ages, occupations, educational backgrounds, and interests. It has the potential to bring people year after year from all over the Midwest who are followers of the Victorian era for many different reasons because they are artists, musicians, historians, collectors, dealers, film lovers, fashion designers, equestrians, or are just plain curious.
Committee members strongly recommended that a Victorian Festival be reestablished in July. The previous West Branch Heritage Days was very popular and could be expanded and become a focal point for enhancing the *Discover Victorian* theme. A weeklong Victorian Festival would celebrate everything Victorian.

The success of this major event depends on the development of a volunteer army of supporters, year after year. The Victorian Festival has the potential of generating significant income for future marketing/advertising programs on an annual basis. It also is the best means of promoting West Branch and enticing tourists to return and spend more time in the area. The keys to the Festival are a strong, committed volunteer organization and efficient pre-planning. That effort entails recruiting new community members from throughout the two corridor townships, the City, and the surrounding communities who love Victorian culture. Without substantial numbers of new volunteers the effort will face extreme difficulty getting launched and being sustainable. Its success cannot be entirely dependant upon that same group of dedicated people who manage the civic events that are held in the area today.

Critical to the success of such a massive undertaking is to break it down into a few manageable initial events and beginning with just two to three of them. Because also critical to success is the ability to do an excellent job with each event. Keep in mind that the ultimate objective here is to have visitors really enjoy themselves. They will tell others about it, want to meet their friends here next year, and eventually mark their calendars to participate every year to some extent (if only for one or two events).

Eventually, and with enough initial success, the other events can fall into place. For example, like-minded individuals with a shared interest in horses may wish to manage an equestrian event.

A committee should also be formed for each additional event with volunteers who share passion and enthusiasm. The group who currently manages the airport fly-in could
manage the hot air balloon event. This single event will bring a new awareness of the West Branch area to the thousands of people that pass by on I-75 and witness a sky filled with colorful balloons. The microbrew beer/ales and food event brings a “cool factor” and can be the initial moneymaker of the Festival. A separate committee should be formed to handle all facets of the microbrew beer/ales and food event: tent rental and placement, traffic flow, sponsorship solicitation, selection of microbreweries and food vendors, signage, insurance, etc. The beauty of hosting this type of event is that it crosses all ages and income segments.

By breaking each event down into small, manageable committees that report to a Festival director the festival can run smoothly and be a wonderful experience for everyone involved. Funds can be generated by some of these other events including the Art Fest and the Film Fest. And, in all cases, sponsors can be found that will bring additional visibility to the Festival as well as help defray operational expenses.

Promotion using every means possible (friend to friend, social marketing, free publicity, sponsorships, etc.) will be the critical, particularly in year one. It is also strongly recommended that all new added events have an income-generating element to them.

Here is additional information about some of the potential elements of the proposed Festival and examples of successful models for these elements:

**Hot Air Balloon Festival** ([www.bcballoons.com](http://www.bcballoons.com)). Also take a look at the Grand Rapids Balloon Festival site ([www.grandrapidsballoonfestival.com](http://www.grandrapidsballoonfestival.com)) as an example of the potential for sponsorships. If the event location can be somewhat controlled, an entrance fee can be charged (Grand Rapids charges a $5.00 parking fee). Other activities can be included in this event to attract families (e.g., vehicles from the local fire departments, police departments, and ambulance companies).
**Antique bicycle race** including high wheelers (Randy Oleynik, a pharmacist in Carleton, MI owns 35 of them)

**Antique bicycle show and swap meet** - Ann Arbor has a very successful model here ([www.ann-arbor-bicycleshow.com/](http://www.ann-arbor-bicycleshow.com/)) featuring bicycles from the 30s and 40s. The Hoosier Antique and Classic Bicycle Club ([www.hoosierbicycles.homestead.com/hireus.html](http://www.hoosierbicycles.homestead.com/hireus.html)) can provide all sorts of bicycles for display including Vintage/Victorian bicycles for a fee. A Petoskey antique shop has some bikes as well.

**Restored antique buggy show** including fire trucks pulled by work horses
Here is an example of a very popular event in Carthage, N.C. ([www.thebuggyfestival.com/events.aspx](http://www.thebuggyfestival.com/events.aspx)). Their event also includes antique tractors.

**Equestrian Dressage event.** Michigan has several events and the Midwest Dressage Association is an excellent place to start. ([www.midwestdressage.org/](http://www.midwestdressage.org/))

**Victorian reenactments** ([www.goldcampvictoriansociety.org](http://www.goldcampvictoriansociety.org)). Reenactments are incredibly popular. There are several organized Victorian reenactment groups that can be hired for special events like the Victorian Festival. Ultimately, it would be exciting (and relevant) to see the West Branch community develop their own reenactment group.

**Victorian fashion show.** This could easily be included as an event or perhaps used as a program to honor and congratulate the volunteers after the Festival is over. This site combines the fashion show with a high tea event. ([www.peninsulahistory.org/victorian-tea-fashion-show/](http://www.peninsulahistory.org/victorian-tea-fashion-show/))
Victorian arts & crafts fair (Already successful in West Branch)

Victorian Era Seminars. Think Charlotte Bronte, Charles Dickens, and Arthur Conan Doyle; extremely popular authors to this day. This is the kind of event that could be done as a stand-alone event associated with the Festival or perhaps as a series, taking place in the spring or fall to extend the tourism season. Topics are limitless: Victorian life, art, literature, history, music, etc. These seminars could easily be combined with other like-events such as a rare books sale and a high tea social. 
(www.midwestvictorian.org/p/conference.html)

Plein Air Outdoor Painting competition and exhibition
This is a very popular event being used by arts organizations to display local artists' work and simultaneously raise funds. Typically these are one day events where local artists work all day to produce and mount "plein air" art work(s). These works are then featured on display for sale at an event that same night. Proceeds from the sales are shared among the artists and the sponsoring organization. (www.glenarborart.org/all-programs/plein-air-paint-out/)

Beer, ale & cocktail festival. There are several extremely successful events in Michigan alone, Grand Rapids (www.summercraftbeerfestival.com/) and Detroit (www.mibeer.com/summer-festival) among them. Leland has an established summer Wine and Food Festival (www.lelandmi.com/events/wine-food-festival/) that generates most of their annual Chamber marketing funds.

Outdoor Music Concert(s)/ Indoor music series. This could be a part of the Victorian Festival or turned into a series to extend the tourism
season into spring and fall. Victorian era music is synonymous with the advent of brass bands. Established regional symphonies/orchestras would be invited.

**Film Festival with Victorian subject matter** - This could be held during the Festival or as a series modeled after one such as the Bay Film Series at the Bay Theatre in Suttons Bay, Michigan that runs one film per month for nine months. (www.thebaytheatre.com/25/-----------------the-bay-film-series)

**Video Campaign**

Video has the distinct advantage of showcasing all of the unique attributes of the West Branch area. There are great restaurants located on the main street and just off the corridor, it has a quaint Victorian downtown that is very photogenic, there are mountain biking and skiing trails, lake and trout stream fishing, and festivals and events that occur year-round. High Definition video is the perfect medium to tell this story and YouTube is the best place to showcase it.

Videos of the activities taking place as a part of the Victorian Festival will bring an international awareness to the event. They have the power to bring to life the experience of witnessing and participating in the Victorian Festival, and can intrigue newcomers to plan to attend and share the experience with their friends (i.e., Facebook, Pinterest, etc.). Viewers can send links to videos of their specific personal interests to others that share those same interests creating a viral effect throughout the web.

Aside from being cost-free for hosting, YouTube videos enjoy a technical advantage in website search engine ranking (SEO). Since Google has acquired YouTube, videos are a very important component of the Google algorithm in its process of calculating website
rankings. All video views get included with a website’s ranking and help move it from Page 20 to Page 1 (the ideal position).

**Television Advertising Campaign**

Television is the most powerful advertising medium in the mix, so it can be a great benefit to the corridor marketing campaign. It is the only way to reach a massive number of potential visitors to West Branch. We must give as many people as possible a good reason to come here in order to achieve our marketing objective of making this area a destination. Only then will we reach the small percentage of the audience who share a passion for all things Victorian and will enjoy the events and activities in the area. That small percentage of thousands of viewers will add up to significant numbers of new visitors.

Television campaign ads can be made from the footage that is captured to create a high definition YouTube video of the area. Advertising placed in the suburban metro Detroit and Tri-Cities TV markets will increase awareness of the area, plant the seed to “Discover Victorian”, and provide the incentive to stop and visit West Branch on their way North.

**Website Opportunities**

A website was created for the “Business Loop” project in the development process and served as the project manager, providing residents, business owners, local officials and interested citizens direct access to the latest project news.

It can be found here: [http://www.partnershipsforchange.cc/westbranch/default.asp](http://www.partnershipsforchange.cc/westbranch/default.asp)

There are many other websites already available for accessing news and information about West Branch and the surrounding area including:

- [http://www.westbranchtownship.org/](http://www.westbranchtownship.org/) (West Branch Township)
- [http://www.wbacc.com/](http://www.wbacc.com/) (West Branch Area Chamber of Commerce)
We are recommending creating a new “mobile-friendly” website focused entirely on the Victorian Festival events. A mobile-friendly website automatically reformats information so it is easily readable and navigable on all mobile devices (such as smart phones and tablets). Current statistics show that mobile access for information is rapidly nearing 50% of all website use, and West Branch needs to be up to speed with travelers seeking information via mobile devices. The West Branch Visitors Bureau is already ahead of this curve, as it has the only mobile-friendly website in the area.

Travelers today expect information to be accessible by phone, immediate, and up to date. We want to be able to meet their needs because it will pay back huge benefits to the communities along the corridor. We recommend linking this new website to all the other websites that serve the accommodation and business needs of the area. Everyone will benefit from the increased web traffic.

Social Media

Both young and old alike can promote the area with various one-on-one social media platforms. The committee encourages all area individuals that are connected via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or any social media to share their experiences in and about the area with online friends. Professionally run social media campaigns are available as a resource, but the committee recommends moving forward on a strictly volunteer basis until professional help is deemed necessary.
PLAN OF ACTION

The Marketing Plan identifies the short-term actions and long-term actions through the next five years in order to provide a framework that can be structurally sound, but also flexible. The tactical plan presented here implements elements that work in concert together and will ultimately impact the entire West Branch area. The principal elements of the plan includes those listed below but could also include other new elements if justified through the decisions of the marketing committee.

Proposed Campaign Schedule

Year 1 Phase I  June 2014 – August 2014

Project Commencement: Research and analysis, and preliminary campaign concept development. Committee/Community meetings and research of relevant campaign elements. Development of the wayfinding system. Begin developing the marketing strategy and outline the priorities for the campaign.

Year 1 Phase II  September 2014 – May 2015

Development of the strategic marketing campaign, a budget for a signage program, creative strategy for a billboard campaign, video production and a television advertising campaign budget. Complete the final draft of the 5-year Marketing Plan

Begin the implementation of the priority items identified in the marketing plan for the 2015 season from the following list of possible elements:

- Wayfinding directional and signage program
- Billboard placement research
- Video and television spot production
- Other advertising and promotional activities
Year 1 – Marketing Plan Budget – $40,000
Marketing Plan development and wayfinding directional and signage system. Includes production and installation of initial wayfinding signs.

Year 2
2015 – Marketing Budget - $49,400
Wayfinding Directional and Signage Program - production and installation of additional signage, development and implementation of I-75 billboard advertising. Establish the foundational elements for the weeklong Victorian Festival starting with the Art Fest, Hot Air Balloon Fest, Antique Show and Swap Meet, and the Microbrew Beers/Ales event as a major means of generating monies for ongoing marketing activities.

Year 3
2016 – Marketing Budget - $68,000
Continuation of I-75 billboard advertising. Produce television and YouTube spots and initiate television advertising program in Tri-Cities region to launch the Victorian Festival. Produce mobile website and launch. Add at least two new events to the Victorian Festival such as inviting reenactment groups (including perhaps a 19th Century baseball game). Conduct inspection of signage and complete any necessary repairs.

Wayfinding Signage $38,000.00
Billboard placement – Two boards on Northbound I-75 $19,000.00
$800 per month x 12 months x 2 boards = $18,000
Design and production costs = $1,000
Video and television spot production $8,000.00
Ad production (.15 second ad) = $3,000
Television ads (:15 seconds each) = $5,000
Mobile Website development/updates $3,000.00

Year 4
2017 – Marketing Budget - $65,000
Continuation of wayfinding signage and I-75 billboard advertising. Expand television advertising program in Tri-Cities region and also target northern suburban Detroit market. Update and revise mobile website as needed. Add at least two new events to the Victorian Festival. Conduct inspection of signage and complete all necessary repair/replacement.

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<td>Mobile website additions</td>
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**Year 5**

**2018 – Marketing Budget - $256,200**

Continuation of wayfinding signage and I-75 billboard advertising. Continue television advertising program in Tri-Cities and northern Detroit suburbs. Update and revise mobile website as needed. Continue Victorian Festival and expand promotion to other Midwestern audiences. Conduct inspection of signage and complete all necessary repair/replacement.

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**Year 6**

**2019 – Marketing Budget – TBD**

Evaluate the effectiveness of all advertising elements and refine accordingly for best mix of billboard advertising, television advertising and other opportunities that present themselves. Conduct inspection of signage and complete all necessary repairs/replacements.
CONCLUSIONS

The West Branch Area has yet to fully realize the impact of the I-75 Business Loop that deposits thousands of shoppers onto their main business corridor. Strategic Partners has created an integrated marketing plan that includes many elements—various forms of media, messaging, and events with a goal of optimizing the “business loop”. However, the short-term goal of directing shoppers down the corridor will bring a limited amount of exposure. As important as these newly realized revenues are for the community, we must be clearly focused on a long-term goal that will bring a higher level of awareness with a much larger audience—to present the West Branch area as a desirable destination.

The message elements of the plan promise to deliver a wonderful experience in reward for taking the time to visit the area. It is imperative that this promise be kept. If so, a new group of believers will be created in the process and they will sing the praises of their experience here. This kind of messaging is priceless. No amount of advertising will ever replace a direct referral from a trusted source.

The objective of this plan is to provide a working outline for enhancing the identity of the area over the next decade. If carried out, the strategic plan can establish a unique personality for West Branch that will belong to the surrounding community, and this new charisma will passed around from person-to-person, group to group, and city to city.

The corridor provides a convenient lifeline for visitors to enjoy all this area has to offer. There is adequate lodging for those wishing to stay overnight or longer. The Victorian Festival gives them a reason to come here, year after year. Undoubtedly, some of these new visitors will want to stay even longer and make this area their new home.

That is long-term and sustainable community-based economic impact.