

Independence Downtown Association

Downtown Business Guidelines for Special Events

Community events represent unique opportunities for downtown businesses to showcase Independence to residents and visitors who may not otherwise be in our downtown. This publication, "Guidelines for Special Events," was produced by the Independence Downtown Association to facilitate maximum business potential for our membership during times when residents and visitors come downtown for community celebrations.

What's so "special" about Special Events? Any event which brings folks downtown for a special reason or during non-traditional business hours represents an opportunity to generate sales in local businesses. The event could be a big festival with "something for everyone" appeal, or it could target a specific niche (like car enthusiasts at a car show). Events may focus on community heritage, traditional (and non-traditional) holidays, or social events that draw residents and visitors downtown. The six common-sense guidelines outlined in this booklet are designed to help you turn downtown events into increased visibility and sales in your business!

1. Be informed

Become an active Independence Downtown Association member. Attend the regular meetings or send an employee to the meetings leading up to a big event so you know exactly what's happening.

The City and the Police Department go a long way to accommodate downtown events in the park and on the streets and sidewalks. If a street closure (or any other aspect of a downtown event) has impacted your business in the past, it may happen again! By being part of the planning process, you can have input in how our public employees handle downtown events.

Spread the word. Your business neighbors might not be IDA members.... It's our responsibility to be ambassadors to the rest of the business community. The more our business people are "on the same page" regarding downtown events, the better we all look to the public.

Be aware of what your business neighbors are doing for the event to avoid duplication of services, information, food, or entertainment options for the public. Mark your calendar. IDA has developed an annual events calendar with all events and happenings important to downtown business. All events are important to downtown.... You decide which events are most important to you.

2. Advertise

It's a proven fact that advertising in conjunction with community events draws attention to your business that benefits you beyond one day or one weekend. Make sure that customers know that you are involved with community happenings and that your business is visible in spite of a big event going on around your downtown.

Take advantage of cooperative advertising with other downtown businesses. The Itemizer- Observer is currently offering special rates to businesses advertising together in conjunction with special events in the community.

Budget for advertising during special events (Hop and Heritage, Western Days, etc.) and seasonal shopping high-points (Christmas, Back-to-School, etc.).

Maximize your exposure during busy times downtown to maximize profits and new customer potential.

Take advantage of *all* advertising outlets: Print media (local and regional), local radio, event-specific promotional publications, alternative or weekly print media, Chamber of Commerce newsletter, flyers, special mailings to your customers, broadcast email, sidewalk sandwich board sign, etc.

How do you know if your advertising is paying off? Try buying an ad that is a clip-out coupon or distribute coupons in some other way. The number of coupons brought in by your customers indicates how effective the ad was. Special tip: Keep a supply of your coupons handy in the store for customers that "forgot" to bring it in!

3. Promote

Sponsorships. The organizers of special events spend a lot of time and money promoting the event to their "customers." Take advantage of opportunities to piggy-back your business onto their promotions. Investing in a sponsorship opportunity puts your business' name on all event promotional material. Sponsor a specific facet of the event or a particular venue like a music stage, the first aid station, or a port-a-potty. Offer the event organizer a donation of your time, expertise, or merchandise to make the whole event better and get extra recognition for your business. (This is especially effective for self employed business people.)

Participate. Display posters, table tents, flyers, etc. for the event in your business and be informed enough to communicate about community events with your customers.

Communicate with your regular customers during event planning. Let them know what's happening, how you are participating, and why they should visit you during the event. Is your business going to be impacted by the event? Special hours? Do street closures or parking availability affect your customers?

4. Specials / Sales

Coordinate your specials and sale opportunities with community events for maximum efficiency and profitability. Special events represent opportunities for downtown businesses to showcase themselves to residents and visitors who may not otherwise be in our downtown. Your “Blowout / Closeout” sales event will enhance a community event and the event will be better with your sales promotions.

Make the connection between your business and the community / seasonal event. Cross promote the event and your sales event.

Let your suppliers and vendors know a big event is coming up. They may have special sale items available and may be willing to help cover promotional / advertising costs. At least let them know that you will be extra busy during big community events.

Run your specials and sales at least a few days beyond the event dates.

Customers may be interested in coming back to take advantage of your specials.

Make sure they get the benefit of the event even if they have to come back during the next week. Keep track of sales generated by the special event.

Communicate with your business neighbors about their specials and sales.

Facilitate cross promotion opportunities with other businesses downtown during an event.

Consider “gimmicks” to generate sales such as canned food, blanket or coat donations for charity to be eligible for additional savings or entry in a contest.

5. Be visible

Special hours: A special community event may have a schedule that will draw a lot of people downtown during non-traditional business hours. It may make sense for you to stay open later (on a Friday evening for example) or during a weekend when you’re normally closed. Make sure your customers know about your schedule changes through your advertising and promotional efforts outlined above.

Window Displays: Open or closed, how does your business look to a first-time Independence visitor? How you look from the *outside* can determine how many customers come *inside* your business and make your cash register ring. Think of your window as a theater stage and decorate your storefront / business location to reflect the community festivities. Use the promotional materials as part of your decorating scheme. Merchandise on the sidewalk, a welcoming “open door” appearance, and a visual link to the community event all stimulate increased sales and customer contact.

Lighting: Even with expanded hours, it may not be possible to remain open during all event activities (think post-fireworks). Consider extra lighting in your storefront displays that will draw attention to your business location. Lights can be set on timers to go off after the crowds are gone. Coordinate with your neighbors to create a night-time downtown landscape that will make folks want to come back during business hours.

Location: Consider a booth or table at the center of the event action even if it's just a block or two from your permanent location.

Special tip: Many successful merchants will move merchandise to the front of the store so it can be easily seen through the doors and windows from the **sidewalk**.

With adequate lighting, customers can window shop at your business after hours!

6. Publicity Stunts

Be creative! Special events are not a time to keep a low profile! What can you do to increase visibility to your business?

Develop Partnerships. Develop a relationship with a non-profit, civic organization, or local club to conduct their fundraising out of your business location. Parents supporting little league baseball could find themselves spending dollars at your business.

Run a contest. (poster contest, poetry contest, coloring contest, essay contest, pet contest, talent contest, etc.)

FREE, FREE, FREE! Give something (anything!) away for free. Balloons, buttons, merchandise samples, popcorn, lemonade, face painting, pencils, music performance, etc. Promote your give-aways.

DO SOMETHING CRAZY! (and promote the stunt.) If you are going to have the high school wrestling team build a human pyramid on your sidewalk to raise money for muscular dystrophy, write a press release and hype it up.

Thinking of Joining IDA?

The Independence Downtown Association is a non-profit corporation that encourages, supports, and preserves the livability and historic nature of the downtown commercial core area of the City of Independence. The membership of IDA believes that "the continuing vitality of the downtown core is beneficial to the entire community."

Joining is Easy! Contact one of our officers, or attend the next IDA monthly meeting at Andy's Café on the 2nd Thursday at 8:00 AM.

Kees Grashoff
Kees' Car Repair
283 S. 2nd Street
503-838-6506

Andy Scott
Andy's Café
227 S. Main Street
503-838-1696

Dan Weaver
Main Street Antiques
144 S. Main Street
503-838-2595

Jane Honbeck
Architect's Atelier
226 S. Main Street, Suite A
503-606-2840

