

INDEPENDENCE IOWA

blueprint

a strategy for brand success

LEVEL 3

prepared for independence by:



bluespace creative™

➤ Imagination ➤ Image ➤ Impact

*bluespace creative is a full-capability
brand communications agency.*

*Our team utilizes research,
experience and imagination to
improve an organization's impact.*

*From neighborhood start-ups to
established Fortune 50 companies,
we build strategies to elevate brands
and encourage success.*

Overview

This report offers an analysis of the brand and marketing efforts of Independence, Iowa, as well as a strategy designed to generate additional activity and interest in the community. This Level 3 Blueprint is a look at the most critical challenges facing Independence from a marketing and branding perspective. Based on the analysis of all gathered research, the professional marketing team at bluespace recommends the specific actions herein to help the city reach its goals.

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addendum

complete survey results
presented as separate document

ASSESSMENT



Overview

OVERVIEW:

While Independence is experiencing challenges similar to those of other small towns across the country, it has many reasons to be optimistic about the future. With a unique history, a strong name, an abundance of recreation opportunities, and numerous updated civic resources, Independence has the ability to distinguish itself in the minds of current and potential residents.

What will define Independence? How can Independence create a better experience for residents, businesses, and visitors?

Leaders in the community believe that defining a distinct identity will not only boost community pride, but also guide future community decisions and establish an effective marketing effort to residents, potential residents, and visitors. This report establishes an assessment of where the Independence brand is today and presents a strategy to help the community achieve its goals for the future.

“Our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant, and to face the challenge of change.”
- Martin Luther King Jr.

PROJECT SCOPE:

bluespace creative is proud to present this report, in cooperation with the community of Independence and volunteer organization, Absolutely Indee.

Independence has contracted bluespace creative to complete core creative projects for the initial stages of the community branding process. Upon completion of this report, and pending the approval of the final bluespace brand strategy, the following assets will be developed:

- **positioning statement** - *The positioning statement (sometimes known as a tagline) effectively summarizes the brand message in a compelling manner, working to inspire the audiences around the community brand.*
- **logo identity** - *Although important, the logo is not the end goal of an effective branding initiative. The logo is the brand's calling card, the communication of the brand message in instant, visual terms. It builds recognition and memorability among the audience while presenting the brand in a positive, professional light.*
- **brand standards guide** - *The brand standards guide is a valuable tool for establishing and maintaining the community's investment in branding. Designed to speak to residents, as much as city officials and professional vendors, this guide will demonstrate proper communication of the brand, as well as how a community brand works. The information provided, will inspire community involvement and increased buy-in.*

ASSESSMENT



Overview

WHAT IS COMMUNITY BRANDING?

Your brand is not your logo, your tagline, or your mission statement. It is not a collection of your colors, fonts, or advertisements. A brand only utilizes these elements as tools.

Your brand is how you are known to those that interact with you: the messages you send, the experiences you create, and the image that you project, are all factors in building a brand. Each one of these things come together to create the perception that eventually takes permanent residence in the hearts and minds of those that come to know you. A brand is not built in one day; but over time, by the actions, words, and decisions of many people. Every person, place, or enterprise has a brand. The question is, "How effective is that brand?"

This blueprint will evaluate how effective your brand is at achieving your goals, and provide recommendations for how to evolve your brand in the future.

KEY TO SUCCESS:

Brand building takes time and is the culmination of all the experiences that an individual has with the brand. Building a brand is not only about spending money on advertising and marketing. It is about consistently delivering on the brand promise. In order for the brand to succeed and sustain, it will be up to everyone in Independence to own and build the brand with positive behaviors and word of mouth promotion. The people of Independence are one of the most powerful tools the community has.

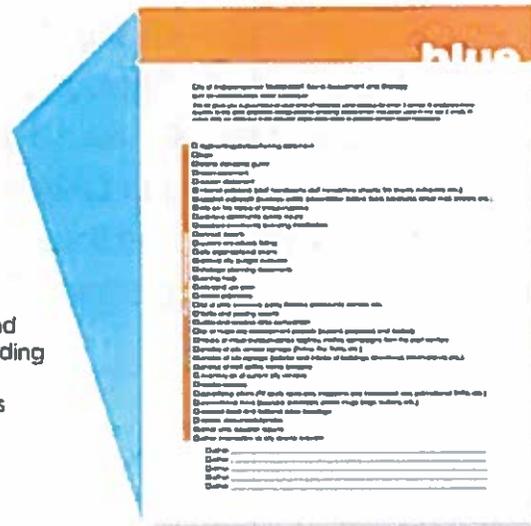
ASSESSMENT



Research Overview

● brand audit

The City, Chamber, and Economic Development committee were asked to submit all available items requested on a brand audit checklist, including marketing materials and research reports



● leadership interviews

one-on-one confidential interviews with City and Chamber members, as well as citizens that were singled out as community leaders, were conducted by a bluespace team member

A variety of research tools were utilized to develop this in-depth and well-rounded brand assessment and strategy.

community surveys

surveys were developed and targeted to specific demographics

- **resident & visitors:** resulted in 200 respondents
- **business owners:** resulted in 20 respondents
- **11th and 12th grade high school students:** resulted in 286 respondents

on-site research

seven members of the bluespace creative team conducted one day of voluntary on-site research in Independence that granted a greater level of depth to their research and assessment

competitive analysis

members of the bluespace team conducted additional research to better understand and analyze surrounding communities

ASSESSMENT



Brand Audit

BRAND ELEMENTS

When it comes to the way you represent your brand, it's simple: everything matters.

Every word, every image, and every action, works to either reinforce or diminish your promise to the world. Moving forward, the community must be able to regulate its message to maintain the integrity of the brand. The consistency of your message, along with the level of quality in how that message is presented, will affect the success of the branding efforts.

Your brand elements are the tangible components that represent your brand. Understanding these elements and the messages they send will help you best represent the brand moving forward.



ASSESSMENT



Brand Audit (cont.)

brand element: CITY NAME

A brand's name is an incredibly important factor because it is the way the brand is referenced thousands of times each day. A city's name is not a matter of choice; it is an inherited trait. Fortunately, Independence is a name with great opportunity and full of positive attributes.

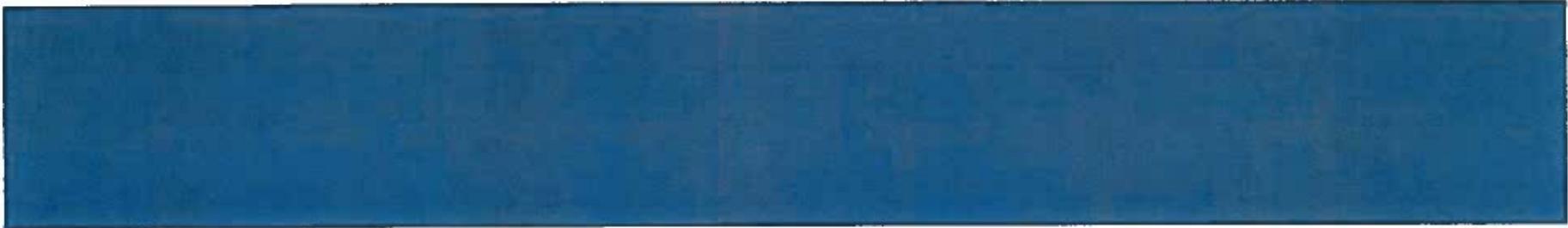
INDEPENDENCE



strong and memorable; instant imagery; values freedom; independent; perceptions of boldness, grit, valor, tenacity, assurance



there are 26 states with cities named Independence, taking from the uniqueness of the name



brand element: BRAND MESSAGE

A brand message is the overall statement that conveys who you are as a brand. It is the idea that inspires, persuades, and motivates people to connect with you. Your message must be unique, focused, based in truth, supported by consistent action, adoptable by the entire community, simple, resistant of negativity, and defiant of fleeting fads and styles.

Independence currently uses multiple messages that lack unity. This dilutes the main positioning and lessens the message's impact, leaving the community without an effective voice.

"America's Fame Is In Our Name" - used on entry signage and City & Chamber websites

"Proud People Promoting Progress" - used on entry signage and City & Chamber websites

"Come live and serve with us! Come build and work with us! Have a play date with us!" - Chamber website

"Live with us! Work with us! Play with us!" - Absolutely Indee website

ASSESSMENT



Brand Audit (cont.)

brand element: LOGOS

One of the most prominent elements of your brand identity is the logo. A strong logo is the iconic foundation of your brand equity, representing who you are and what you stand for in instant, visual terms.

While Independence does have an official identity for city-wide use, related entities like the Chamber, Absolutely Indee, and the library, all use completely separate identities. This creates a lack of distinction and overall presence for the Independence logo and avoids the key opportunity to cross-promote.

On the whole, the Independence logo is unrefined and lacks memorability and impact.



OFFICIAL IDENTITY



WEB IDENTITY



VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



PUBLIC LIBRARY



brand element: COLORS

In general, the community of Independence has widely adopted the use of the colors red, white, and blue for communication pieces and physical aspects of the community, but does not currently have a defined color palette. This has led to multiple hues being used throughout the community, sending an inconsistent message to residents and visitors alike. An issue such as this, is a prime example of something a brand standards guide will easily standardize.

**331 1st Street East
Independence, IA 50644
Phone: 319-334-2780**

**331 1st Street East
Independence, IA 50644
319-334-2780 Phone 319-334-2037 Fax**

**331 1st Street East
Independence, IA 50644
P: 319.334.2780 F:
319.334.2037**

brand element: FONTS

A lack of consistent font family usage can be found across much of Independence's marketing and promotional pieces. Like color, fonts convey their own subtle messages and must be used consistently to present a strong and memorable brand.

**331 First Street East
Independence, IA 50644-2814**

**331 First Street East
INDEPENDENCE, IA 50644-2814
PH :(319) 334-2780 FX :(319) 334-2037**

Procured from a variety of stationery and websites

ASSESSMENT



Brand Audit (cont.)

brand element: MARKETING & PROMOTION

An evaluation of Independence's marketing pieces revealed issues common among small communities. While all civic entities are making great efforts to promote their individual cause, they are not working well together to promote the community as a whole. In general, this leads to a broad mixture of messages that do not clearly represent the brand, poor promotion of great community assets, and fragmented information for the reader.

Research revealed that the current tone and presentation of Independence's marketing and promotional material is very straightforward, dry, and generally missing the mark on its representation of valued attractions and landmarks.



“We lack a cohesive vision; we need people to step up, take pride, and work together in the community. Not just to promote their little corner.”
- Resident



VISITORS PACKET: Although visitors that request information about Independence can receive an abundance of materials, it is difficult to come by. Visitors to the Independence website are redirected to the Chamber website, where physical materials must be requested by phone or email. When the bluespace team acted as a visitor interested in moving to Independence, the Chamber did a great job of providing resources; however, the items contained in the visitors packet were prime examples of the lack of brand standards and messaging.

items received

- multiple maps
- school programs
- hotel information
- rack cards and brochures for attractions and civic resources
- county welcome guide
- list of local businesses



Many individual community assets were represented in the visitors packet, but the items lacked a consistent message and brand feel.

ASSESSMENT Brand Audit (cont.)

brand element: WEBSITE



City of Independence Homepage



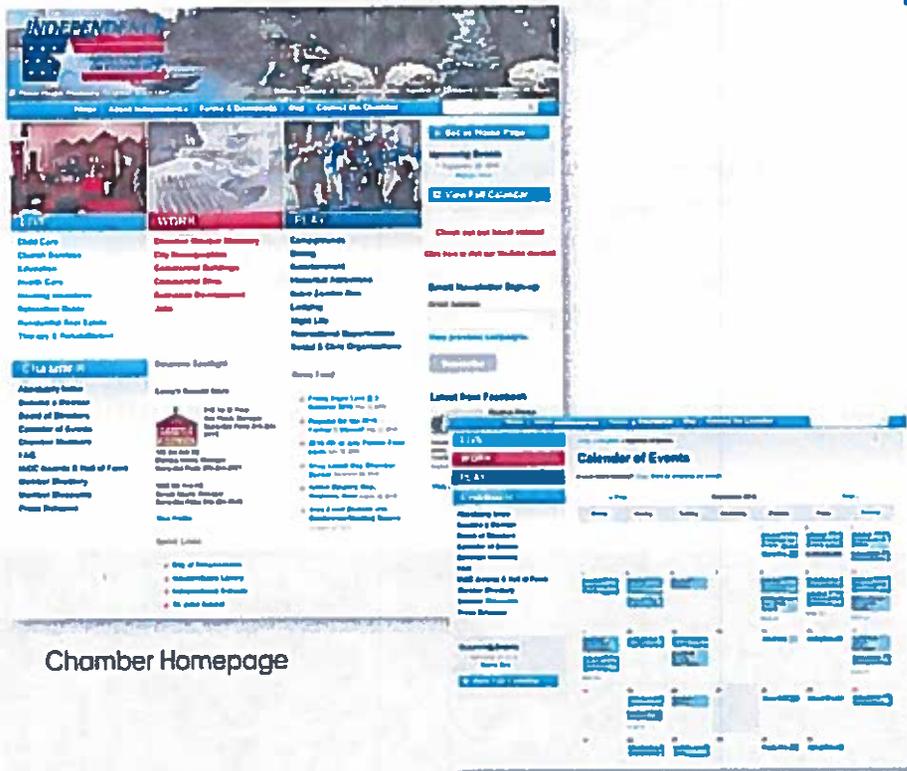
Homepage Mobile

+ POSITIVES

- aesthetics
- organized menus
- 'notify me' feature
- 'community voice' page
- current news & announcements calendar
- promotion of library
- quick links
- striking imagery in certain instances
- detailed parks & recreation information
- thorough historic information
- numerous online forms and downloads
- responsive design
- abundance of information, such as surveys and reports

- NEGATIVES

- compelling identities
- social media links do not redirect to official social media channels
- video tour does not stand out and is not easily accessible
- broken links
- poor image quality in certain areas
- no easy way to search and/or navigate through information



Chamber Homepage

Calendar of Events Page

+ POSITIVES

- organized categories
- today's events & the event calendar are convenient and up to date
- quick links to other Independence resources
- latest from Facebook link for social media users
- detailed relocation guide
- eNewsletter signup/ options to view previous eNewsletters
- listed job opportunities
- large member directory

- NEGATIVES

- recent news feed is not kept up-to-date
- no option for requesting physical materials
- broken links
- competing positioning statements
- business spotlight is lacking information
- conflicting demographics
- outdated press releases

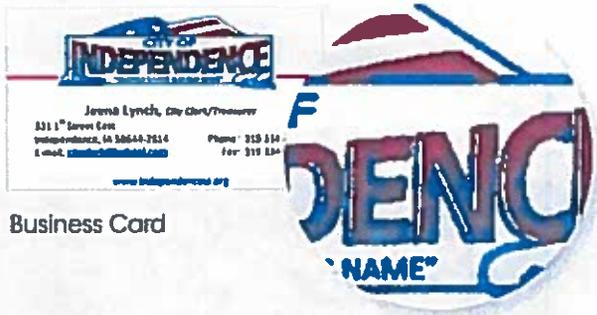


While both of these sites appear to serve the purpose they were created for, the overall identity is disjointed and inconsistent. The community should speak as a whole.

ASSESSMENT  Brand Audit (cont.)

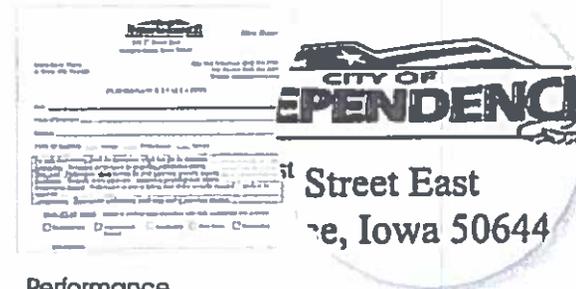
brand elements: DESIGN QUALITY, CONSISTENCY, PRESENTATION

DESIGN QUALITY: Materials distributed in Independence directly effect the perception of the city. Many of the materials that were reviewed appear to be held to an average to below average design standard, which projects a low level of community pride, as well as a low sense of professionalism.



Business Card

blurring
on these business cards, the quality is low enough that colors and lines start blurring together



Performance Evaluation Form

skewing
on this document, the city identity is stretched and misaligned with the address, leaving an inconsistent impression



Budget is always a concern for marketing efforts, but there are ways to greatly improve the presentation of Independence's communications, even on a limited budget.

“Consistency is the true foundation of trust. Either keep your promises or do not make them.”
 - Roy T. Bennett

CONSISTENCY: The lack of brand standards amongst the aforementioned elements converge to create a weak brand projection and sense of fragmentation. Proper brand guidelines containing brand maintenance measures, will help better shape the complete identity of the revitalized brand, as well as ensure it is maintained.



Job Application

inconsistency included within the logo of this document is the positioning statement, while a different font displays the address

PRESENTATION: The quality of how marketing messages are presented can speak volumes to a potential visitor or resident. Print pieces are representative of who Independence is as a community and what they stand for.



City Letterhead

presentation at the top of the city letterhead, the identity's flag is cut off and is a lighter shade of red

ASSESSMENT



Leadership Interviews

LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW INSIGHTS:

When leaders were asked if they are proud to live and do business in Independence, the answer was a resounding YES! They affirmed that people are proud to be from Independence and that it is those people that make the community great. Many leaders shared common beliefs of what the community's strengths are, as well as the challenges the City faces.

STRENGTHS

Location: A lot of Independence's strength lies in its proximity to U.S. 20 and Interstate 380. Being within an hour of several larger cities makes Independence the ideal place to raise a family while opening residents up to more career opportunities.

Community Events: Offering an abundance of community events inspires involvement from a variety of demographics.

Upgraded Resources: The hospital, junior high school, parks and recreational facilities, aquatic center, and library are all considered to be community assets.

CHALLENGES

Employment, leadership, housing options, nightlife entertainment, negative people, high property taxes and limited shopping options were all seen as challenges in keeping residents happy living in Independence. They were also recognized as a deterrent in attracting new residents, businesses, and visitors.

“A good, small community in an upward swing.”
- Community Leader

Leaders say these are the qualities that make Independence unique:



geographic location



people and volunteerism



community events



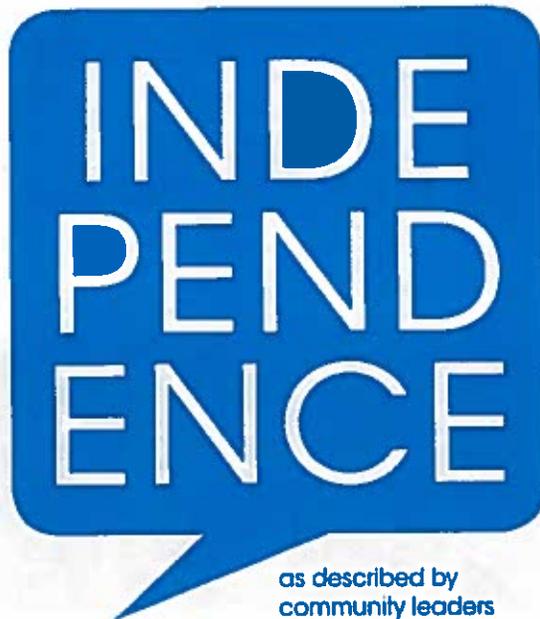
parks and recreation facilities



new and improved resources



Wapsipinicon River



"boasts some of the region's best community events."

"is a friendly, clean and safe community with a fantastic school system."

"is becoming more forward thinking, there is a changing of the guard and the mindset is changing."

"if you are not from here you are an outsider especially in the churches."

"is family-friendly and quiet, good place to raise a family and have a fairly peaceful life."

"is a historical town, gaining speed on community events."

"does not have a lot of amenities, but the basics are here and it is safe."

"many ppl [sic] work in IND but live in Oelwein and Winthrop where properties and taxes are cheaper."

"1st street is not attractive, thought about not moving because of it."

"there are housing issues & gaps in market for certain types of housing."

"is a small town, nothing to do, nothing here, it is expensive to live here."

ASSESSMENT Leadership Interviews

7 OUT OF 11 LEADERS 
say they were brought back to Independence due to job opportunities

9 OUT OF 11 LEADERS 
think people move away from Independence because of job opportunities

11 OUT OF 11 LEADERS 
are proud to live and do business in Independence

10 OUT OF 11 LEADERS 
had unfavorable comments about Independence retail options

9 OUT OF 11 LEADERS 
say that the 4th of July Celebration is what embodies the city the most

5 OUT OF 11 LEADERS 
believe the City does a good job of communicating with the residents of Independence

2 OUT OF 11 LEADERS 
are satisfied with the work the Chamber is doing



POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS

- “ People like each other within the community, I feel like Independence is full of good people.”
- “ Great school system, the new school is beautiful, lots of work on the fields and facilities for sports, the hospital is making positive changes and there are more and more services becoming available.”
- “ I love to hear new residents and visitors talk about our friendly and fun community. Many mention the number of events we have each year and describe the community as cute/quaint and family-friendly.
- “ Very safe place to be, doors can be unlocked, kids can walk home from school, there are still a lot of opportunities for people to be involved within the school, library, and community.”
- “ People actually do come to town for shopping believe it or not, some stores people travel in to see.”



NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS

- “ Downtown is ugly needs revitalized.”
- “ The money, it feels like there is a hidden agenda, why does everything seem secret; is there a way to bridge that communication gap?”
- “ I feel there's less than 10 shops to duck in and out of; people want more businesses.”
- “ Within the community, there is a perception that voices aren't being heard. Whether that is true or not, is yet to be determined. We do have many people who are just negative about EVERYTHING and want something to complain about.”
- “ There are people that get jealous of people with money, there are people in the community that give time and money/dollars towards progression. Then you have people that don't agree or don't participate.”



FUTURE CHALLENGES

- “ Housing and the ability to attract young professionals will always be an issue.”
- “ We will always struggle when it comes to attracting the appropriate industries and jobs with the types of wages that will continue to grow the City and its tax base.”
- “ Doing things to grow the town instead of just maintaining it.”
- “ Having the money to support everything without taxing the hell out of us.”
- “ The politics of things, we need to figure out how to get past that and make sure we have true leaders that are willing to listen.”
- “ Uses of the city budget that burden taxpayers.”
- “ Older groups embracing the younger ones, collaborations between the young and the old.”

ASSESSMENT



Community Survey

COMMUNITY SURVEY OVERVIEW:

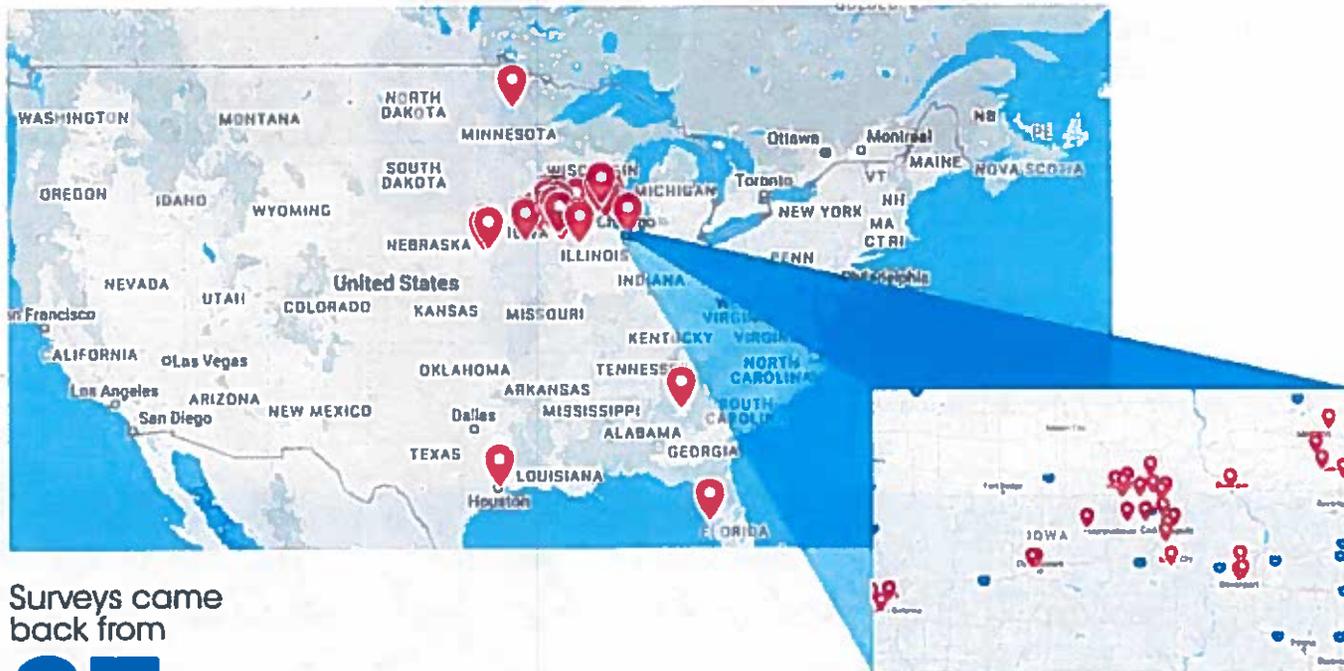
To gain insight into community perceptions and experiences, a survey was created and made available to Independence residents, visitors, 11th and 12th grade high school students, and business owners. The survey answers also provided a community voice in the process of forming the community vision and direction.

The following pages provide key survey results, highlight quotes from residents, visitors, business owners, and community leaders, and summarize common themes and observations.

Note: Many questions in the survey were open-ended; therefore, results that are shown in percentages may not be reflective of a true 100%. A complete list of the survey results may be found in the addendum.



GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF RESPONDENTS:



Surveys came back from

37

different zip codes

What do you like most/least about living in Independence?

SMALL COMMUNITY CHARACTER

64.3%

41%

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

ALSO SCORED HIGH:

- Convenience of Location
- School District
- Public Library

ALSO SCORED POORLY:

- Shopping Options
- Dining Options
- Cost of Living

Which words do you believe best describe Independence?

Friendly

Maintaining

Safe

Traditional

Traditional

Narrow-Minded

(as answered by current residents)

(as answered by former residents)



People who moved away from Independence chose words that imply that failure to grow and be progressive were factors in their decision to leave.

Do you feel the community is friendly?

YES

but...

although the majority of residents, visitors, and business owners feel that Independence is friendly, all three groups noted that the community can be "cliquey" and "unwelcoming to outsiders."

“

I feel that the community in general tries to be friendly. However, I have noticed that members of the community often times are only superficially friendly or are even unfriendly to newcomers or 'outsiders'.

- Resident

Visitors were asked: Are the signs in town attractive? Are directional signs to attractions available and easy to follow?



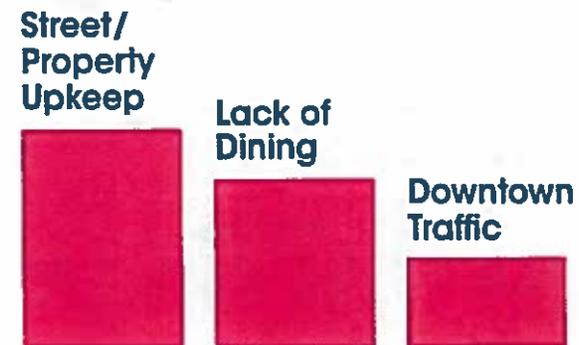
Here's what some had to say:

“Some signage is misleading.”

“Signs aren't large enough for speed or traffic.”

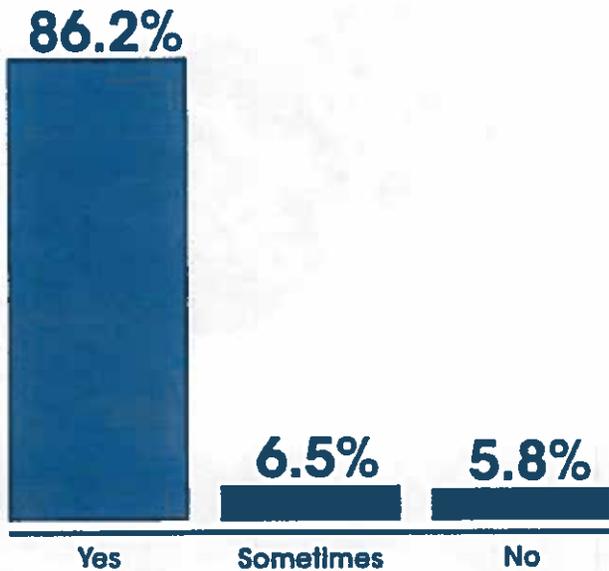
“Need more/no directional signs to main attractions.”

Visitors were also asked to name 3 things they disliked about Independence:



“The town seems a little run down. Some of the buildings need painted and cleaned up. The operating hours of downtown businesses don't work too well for someone that works out of town till 5pm.”
- Visitor

Residents were asked: Do you make an effort to shop local?



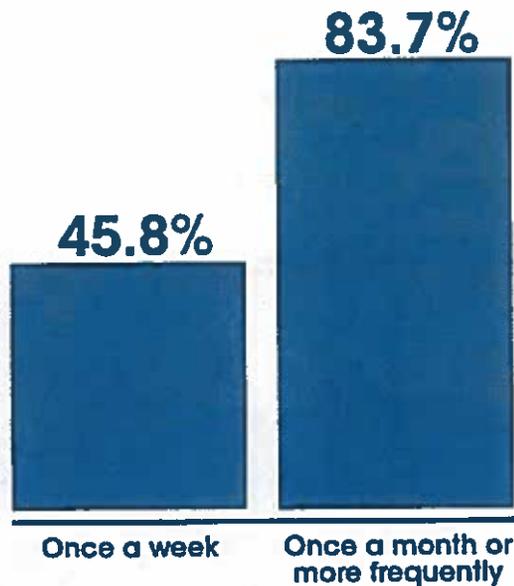
100% of business owners said that they make an attempt to shop locally

Are you able to buy everything you need in Independence? If not, what can't you buy?



More than 1/2 to almost 3/4 of respondents said they could not buy clothing or shoes in Independence

Residents were asked: How often do you leave Independence to shop?



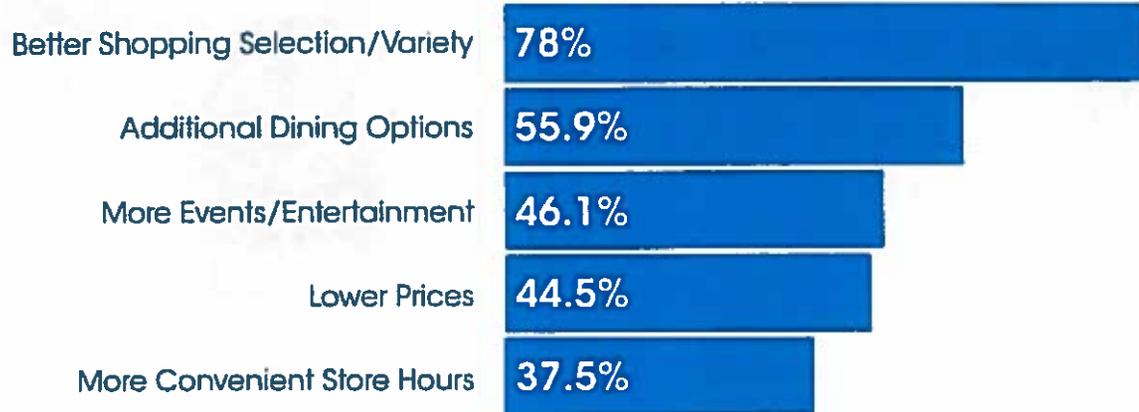
57.5% of students said the main reason their families travel to Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids, and Waterloo, is for shopping

On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the strongest, residents were asked to rate the strength of the retail business sector in Independence



On these pages, we see that the residents of Independence make an effort to shop locally, but they are unable to buy what they need, so they leave, to shop elsewhere.

Residents were asked: Which of the following things may cause you to increase the amount of business/activities you do in Independence?



42.9%

of business owners believe that the most effective way to increase the amount of business and activities people do in Independence is to have better shopping selection/variety

68.8%

of visitors say that additional dining options would increase the amount of business/activities they do in Independence

What type of new business development do you feel would benefit Independence the most?

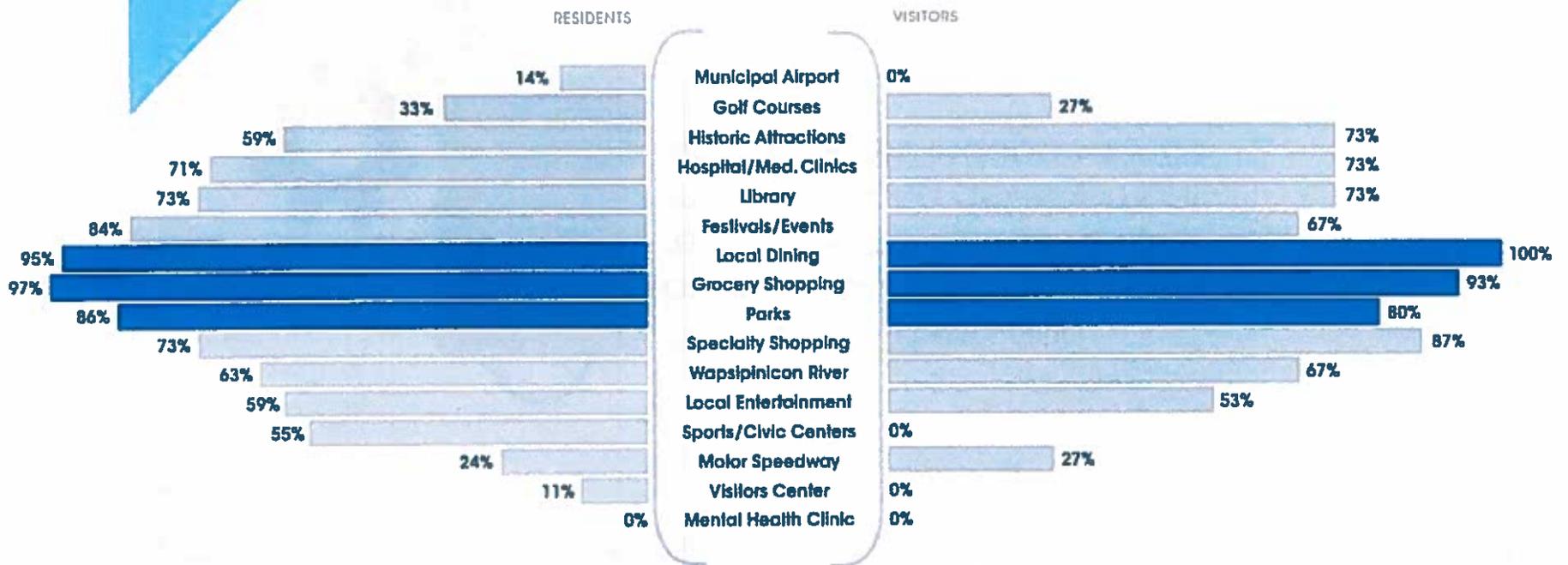


Between residents and business owners, over 1/2 of the respondents say that retail and manufacturing development would benefit Independence the most.

*The top answers for students and visitors, when asked if they could choose 1 amenity from a larger nearby city to relocate to Independence, were: **shopping/retail opportunities***

On average, how often do you utilize each of the following community assets?

percentages are representative of those that rated use as "occasionally" to "frequently"



When students were asked what their favorite thing to do in Independence was, 40.7% responded with a physical activity. Many mentioned going to the parks.

“ Going to the library, park, or anything else that contains physical activity”

“ I like riding bikes on the trail and I wish there were more of them.”

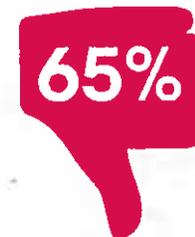
“ I enjoy going to the parks and public events with my sisters.”

*Residents rated Independence on its delivery of the following items:
(Items were ranked on a scale from 1-5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest)*



Residents were asked to rate the assets most valuable to them:

THE TOP 3 ARE
Local Dining
Health Facilities
Parks



of visitors responded with "not sure" and "no" when asked if they were aware of a visitors station

This graphic shows a sample of some of the highest and lowest ranked items. For a complete list of all items ranked, please see the addendum

If Independence offered the following arts and entertainment options, how likely would you be to attend?

percentages are representative of those that rated use as "likely" to "extremely likely"



“Canoe rental on the Wapsie would be great you could probably make money with it too.”
- Resident

“Boat races? Bring them back. Dredge the lake.”
- Resident

“Art fests are great, but the items would have to be affordable to really spend money. Might be interesting to have a flea market.”
- Resident

INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION

80% of residents feel that the 4th of July Celebration is the most valuable to the community

“4th of July Celebration was always well done.”
- Former Resident

25% of residents surveyed said the 4th of July Celebration is the event they would most likely volunteer for

25.6% of students said that their favorite memories that take place in Independence are from the 4th of July Celebration

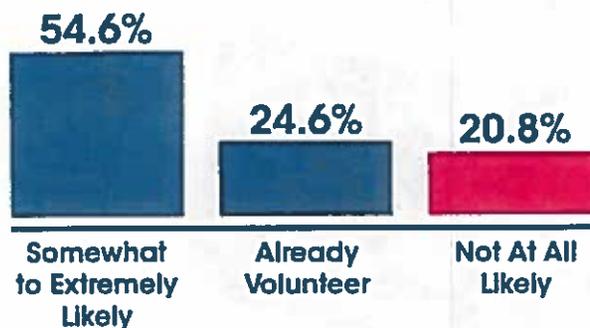


“A community with a great 4th of July Celebration and many other events for the public.”
- Visitor

“The Independence Day Celebration is next to best in nation; we are starting to get notoriety for that.”
- Resident

43.8% of visitors who have attended the 4th of July Celebration rate it as being extremely valuable

How likely are you to consider volunteering to assist with a local community event?



▶ WHY NOT?

Residents said that *time & scheduling* were the main factors in why they don't volunteer

▶ *"Health," "Dislike event," and "Dislike people" were also mentioned*



57.1% of business owners are already volunteering

*How transparent is the City government on a scale from 1-5?
(1 being "not at all transparent" and 5 being "extremely transparent")*

38.7%
RESIDENTS

50%
BUSINESS
OWNERS

Many residents and business owners rated the City government transparency a **1** or **2**

“There’s a lot of ‘politics’ happening behind the scenes that a lot of people don’t see. And that’s not in the best interests of the City and it’s [sic] residents.”
- Resident

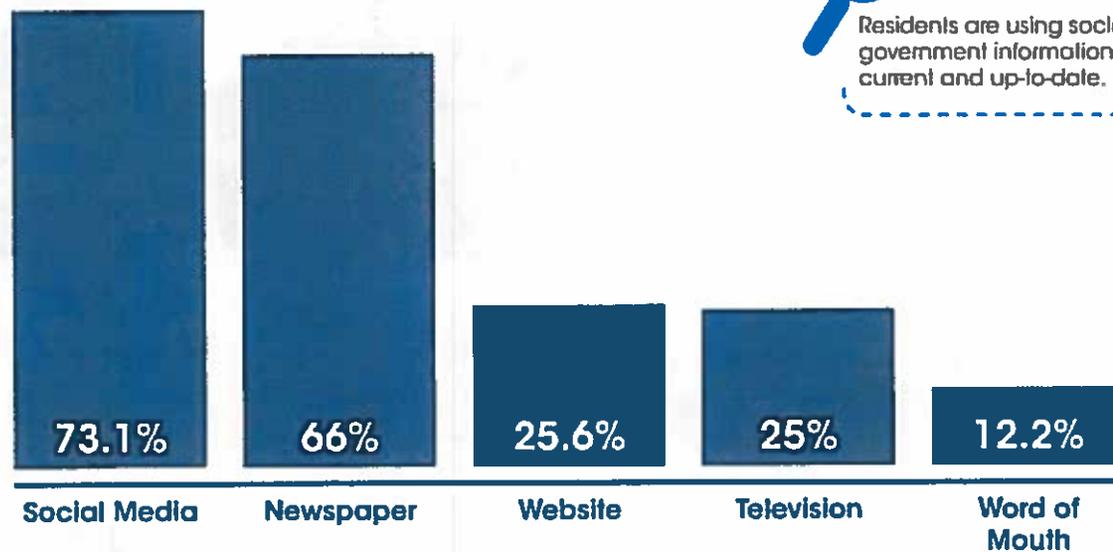
“I wish that they would broadcast the City Council meetings with better audio and video. It is almost impossible to see and hear everyone!”
- Resident

“I think our City government lacks. I feel the only time something is noticed, is when something goes wrong...very wrong. How about trying to get us noticed for something good.”
- Resident

“I have no idea what they do.”
- Resident

“I feel there are a lot of hidden agendas.”
- Resident

How do you receive information about the City government?

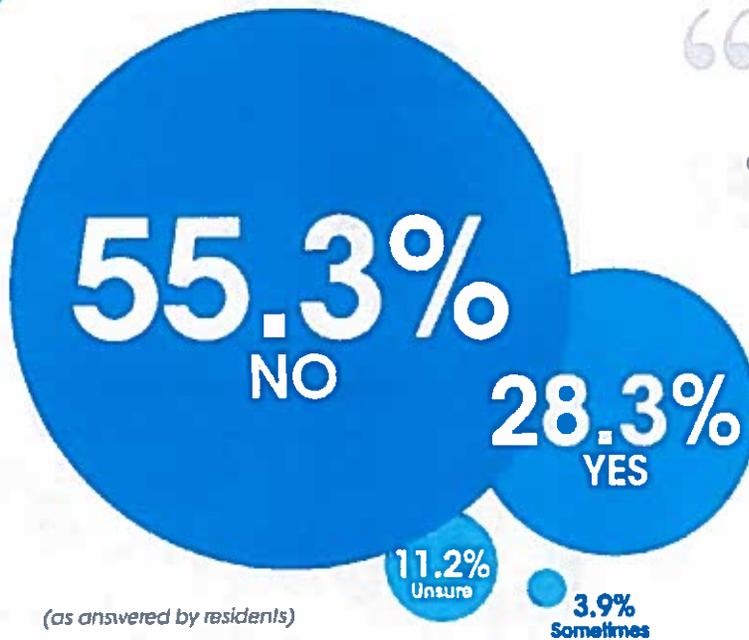


Residents are using social media to receive government information. It is imperative to stay current and up-to-date.

“Council TV when it works and there is sound.”
- Resident

“Word of mouth, I do not have cable or basic television due to the cost.”
- Resident

Do you feel the residents of Independence have a cohesive vision for the future?



“Independence always feels like it is split into two groups. One group wants the City to grow and be progressive. The other group doesn't want anything to change. It would be nice if these two groups could find some middle ground.”

- Resident

“No. We have way too many silos. Organizations and people do their own thing. There is no unifying vision for the town.”

- Resident

What could Independence improve upon to become a better community?

Let's work together!



Business
Owners

*More community
involvement!*



Residents

More dining and retail!



Visitors

*We want more
activities for teens!*



Students

*More trail and
river investment!*



Former
Residents

What are some common positive and negative perceptions about businesses in Independence?



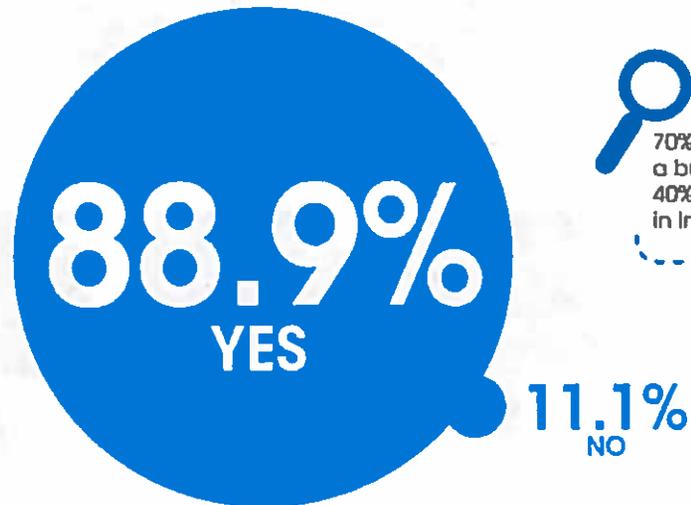
“Friendly business owners and staff, good personal service, many businesses happy to go the extra mile for their customers.”
- Business Owner

“Too expensive, not enough variety and selection, too many items that can't be purchased in Indee unless a person is happy with Walmart quality, unsatisfactory business hours.”
- Business Owner



“Downtown shopping...less offices, more shops.”
- Resident

Business owners were asked: Are you proud to do business in Independence?



70% of business owners surveyed have owned a business in Independence for 11+ years. 40% of those surveyed have owned a business in Independence for more than 20 years.

“ Yes...if not we should rethink why we have a business here.”
- Business Owner

“ Yes, I am proud to be a long-standing member of the downtown community.”
- Business Owner

Are there any businesses that people from out-of-town routinely come shop at?

71.4%

of business owners say that people are coming from out-of-town to shop at specialty stores

business owners specifically listed the following businesses:
Little Red Schoolhouse,
Laree's, Distinctions,
S&K Collectibles,
Fabulous Fridays,
Quilters Quarters

14.3%
of business owners listed Wal-Mart



An increase in the type of stores that people are already coming to Independence for can be looked at as an opportunity to grow the downtown business district.

Business owners: What are the hopes for the future of downtown?

42.9%

of business owners described the future of downtown Independence as being vibrant, unique, youthful, and creating draw from surrounding communities



My hope is that we can figure out a way to bring in some new and different retail."

- Business Owner

As a business owner, what is the biggest complaint that you personally have or have received about the City government?

"HIGH TAXES"

"LIMITED COMMUNICATION"

"LACK OF INTEREST DOWNTOWN"

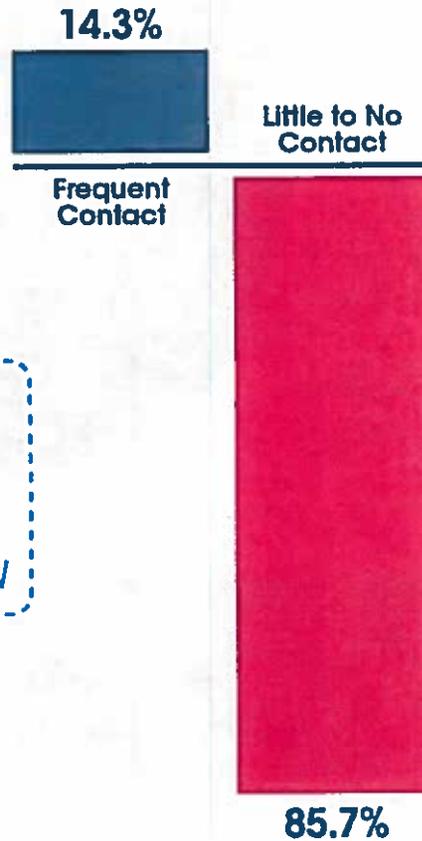
"WASTEFUL SPENDING"

“ They spend money foolishly. Need to live within their means like the rest of us businesses.”
- Business Owner

“ They are not seen in our establishments.”
- Business Owner

“ Out of touch with what people want.”
- Business Owner

*How often does the Chamber contact your business?
What, if anything has it done for your business recently?*



35.7% said they get contacted only for annual dues and event sponsorship

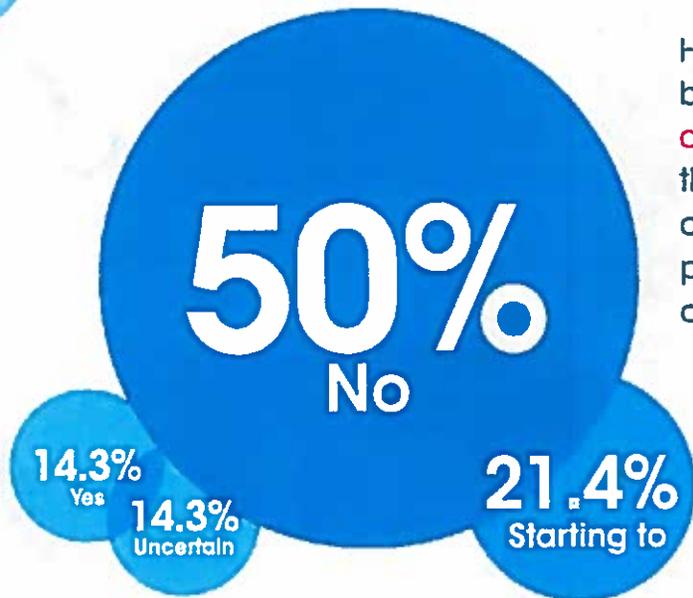


42.9% of business owners say the Chamber could help them with

- PROMOTION
- EDUCATION
- COORDINATION

“Be more proactive, seems like all they do is fundraising events to ensure the existence of the Chamber.”
- Business Owner

Business owners were asked: Do you feel the businesses of Independence have a cohesive vision for the future?



Half of the business owners surveyed said they believe Independence is **not on the right track** and is **not heading in the right direction**. They feel things are **stagnant**, that there is a **divide** between older, close-minded people and younger, progressive people, that the taxes are too high, and that new leadership is needed.

“No one works together to make things successful. There’s no team work.”
- Business Owner

“Guidance from a good Chamber director and interaction with the City government would really help.”
- Business Owner

Residents were asked: If addressed in the next 2-5 years, what do you believe would make the most impact on the quality of life for current and future citizens?

Residents and former residents were asked: What is/was your least favorite thing about living in Independence?

Former residents were asked: What was your primary reason for moving away from Independence?

Visitors were asked: What aspects are the most important when making a decision about where to live?

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

ASSESSMENT



On-Site Research

ON-SITE RESEARCH: community aesthetics

To get a better sense of the feel and spirit of the community, the bluespace team visited Independence. On May 20, 2016, seven team members spent the day collecting qualitative data, conducting on-site interviews, and observing the downtown area, parks and recreation areas, neighborhoods, and various entrances leading into town.

The team made an effort to talk with community members at shops and restaurants to record perceptions from a visitor standpoint. In addition, photos were taken to record firsthand experiences.

The following pages present an overview of the observations gathered by the bluespace team and a sample of the photos taken.

NATURE



The city's natural landscape, with its parks and open spaces, large, established trees, and peacefulness of the river, promote a sense of tranquility and connection to the outdoors.

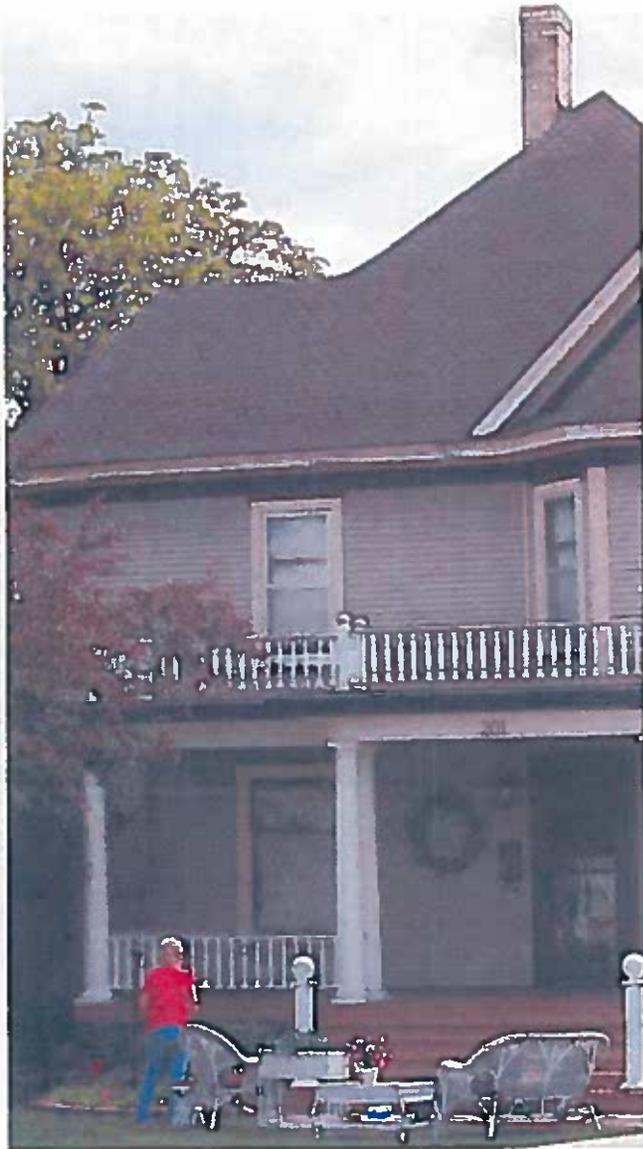
PARKS / RECREATION



There are many opportunities for recreation in Independence. From basketball, to sand volleyball, to frisbee golf at the parks, to the year-round recreational facilities, the active nature of the residents is underlined throughout the city.



RESIDENTIAL



While exploring neighborhoods, the team observed many residences that were well-maintained. The Italianate style of the homes is well-represented and undeniably adds to the charm of the community.



DOWNTOWN



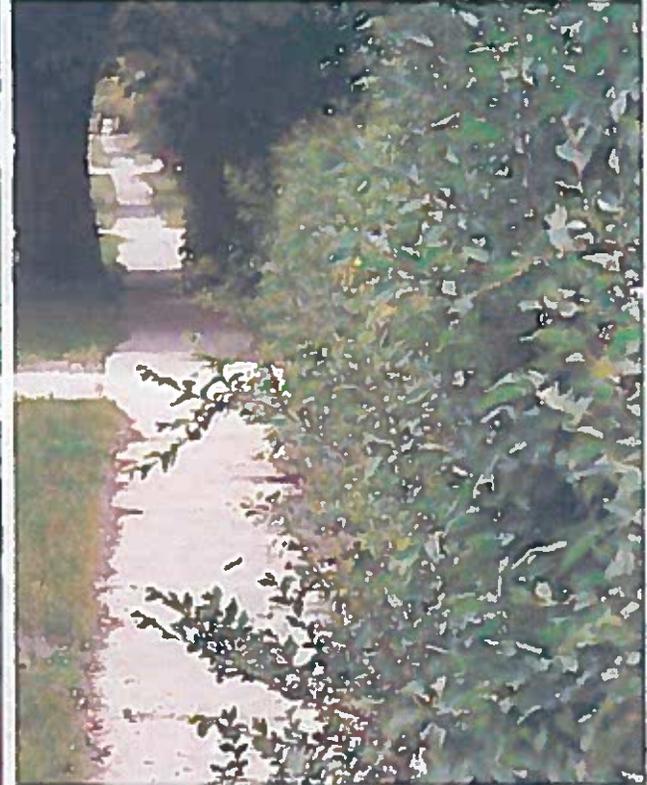
The main stretch of businesses downtown is on an extremely busy road. The street level area of downtown was well kept with flowers and clean walkways, but the overall aesthetics were a hit and miss for the team. Some observations included: unattractive second level storefronts and business signage, lack of places to sit, lack of available trash receptacles, and an overall incohesive look.

GREEN SPACE



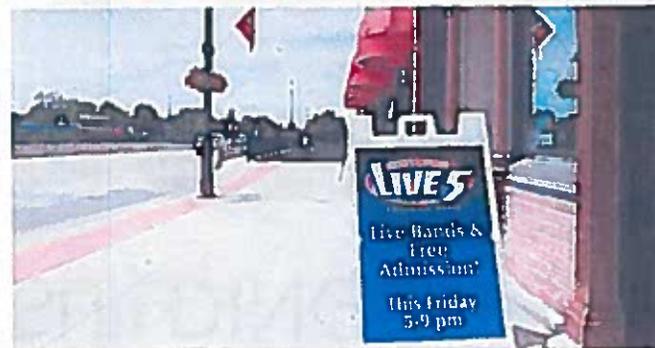
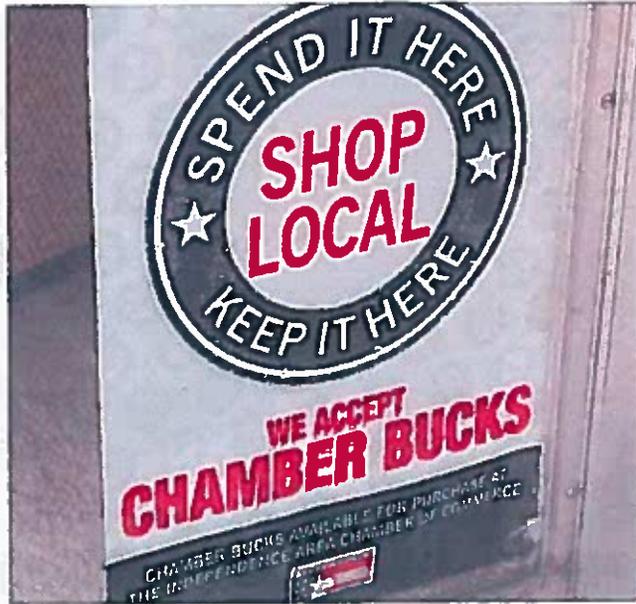
The team noted many vast green spaces. Whether it was a residential yard or a public space, the natural landscapes were abundant throughout the city.

WALKABILITY



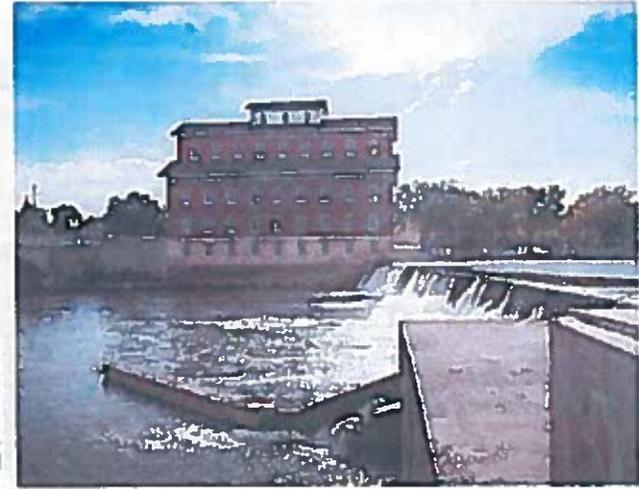
The team spent a good amount of time walking around the downtown area, parks, and residential areas. The walkability of Independence varies throughout.

SIGNAGE



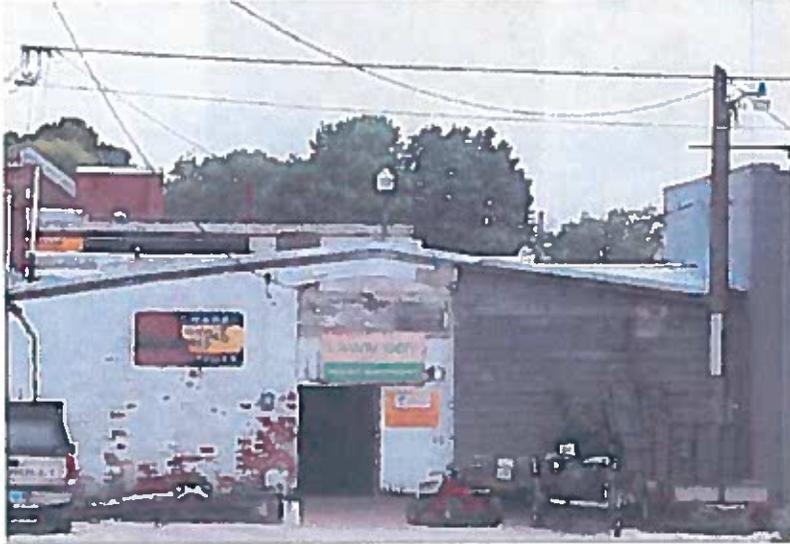
Being unfamiliar with Independence, special attention was given to the directional signage in the town, as well as how the signs pulled visitors from the highway. The team consensus was that this is an area with many opportunities.

BUILDINGS



Independence is full of landmarks and interesting architecture. The buildings and their historical significance, are an opportunity to draw people to the community.

ROUGH AREAS



Many areas seemed to be neglected and in various states of disrepair. Leaving things uncared for sends a powerful message to residents and visitors alike.



ASSESSMENT



On-Site Research (cont.)

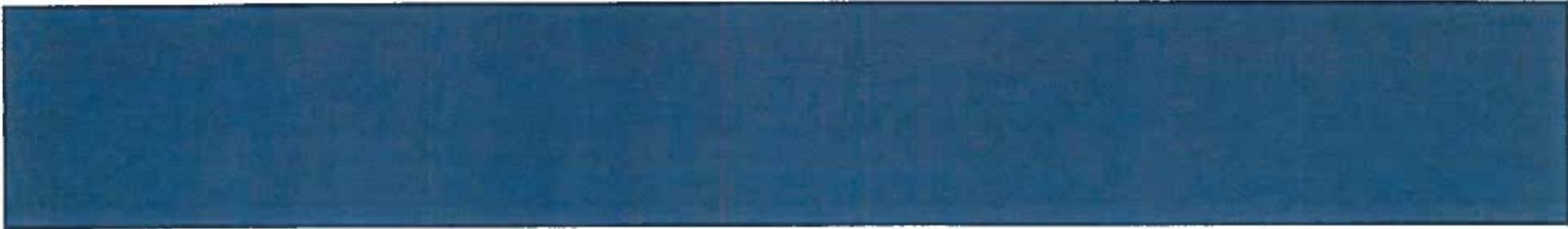
ON-SITE RESEARCH: community aesthetics: areas for improvement

The aesthetics of a community are a huge opportunity to differentiate itself from its competitors, reflect its personality, and invite commerce.

Neglected areas can send an immediate and uninviting message to visitors and potential businesses. This can also affect resident pride.

While many areas were well-maintained and attractive, the bluespace team observed several opportunities for great improvement.





community entry signage

With a lack of signage and no promotion of local opportunities, the entrance to town could easily be missed, appears unwelcoming, and ignores an opportunity to make passing visitors aware of all that Independence has to offer.

directional signage

The directional signage in town points to parks, fairgrounds, school, and parking areas; however, there is very little attempt to pull residents and visitors to one of the town's major assets: the Wapsipinicon river.

dilapidated or unattractive signs

On both closed and open businesses, signs were in disrepair and often disharmonious with the style of architecture. There is not a consistent downtown personality.



ASSESSMENT



On-Site Research (cont.)

poor seating downtown

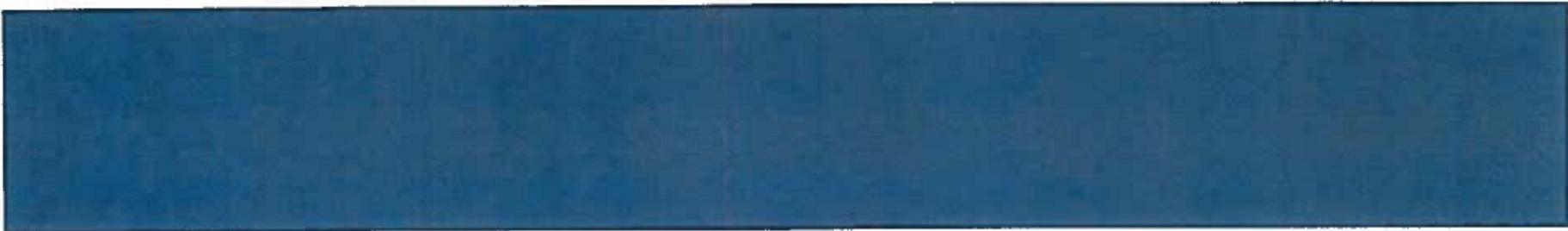
Those who wish to spend the day shopping in Independence will notice that there are no opportunities to sit and rest between shops. Lack of seating can discourage foot traffic and limit the amount of time spent shopping downtown altogether.



heavily faded street paint and poorly maintained sidewalks

Many downtown crosswalks had this issue. Overgrowth and cracked cement were noted throughout residential areas.





littered and neglected sub-level stairwells downtown/lack of trash receptacles

This problem is prominent along downtown walking paths, with fast food litter, bottles, and cigarette butts, being most commonly seen. Overall, this projects a poor image of resident pride.

The small number of garbage cans uptown is surely a contributing factor to this issue. The receptacles the team did find were undersized and packed full.



ASSESSMENT



On-Site Research (cont.)

closed storefronts

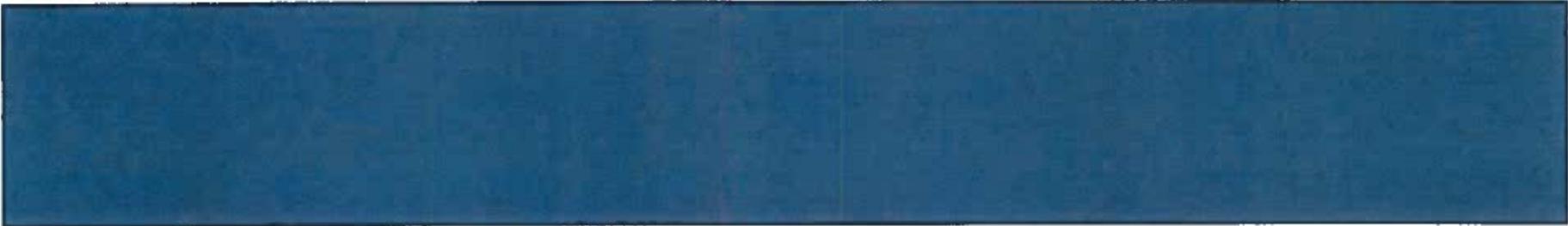
Abandoned business spaces with exposed messes and remnants of the former business leave a sense of decline where opportunity should be communicated. The vacant Malek movie theatre is one amongst many.



vandalism

Graffiti and spray-painted markings were apparent on the sides of buildings, as well as along bridges and walls in areas near river access.





exposed eyesores

The crumbling backsides of storefronts, which can be seen along one main entryway into town, deteriorating equipment in multiple parks by residential areas, chipping and faded paint on building exteriors, rotting wooden benches, and unmaintained grassy areas, all send the wrong kind of message to residents, visitors, and potential businesses.



ASSESSMENT: COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

CITY NAME	LOGO IDENTITY	POSITIONING	FOUNDED / HISTORY	POPULATION*	MEDIAN AGE*	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME*
Independence		"America's Fame is in Our Name" "Proud People Promoting Progress"	Founded in June 1847. Named after the approaching date of July 4th.	5,968	40	\$46,589
Jesup		"The Right Place"	Founded in 1860 when railroad was being constructed through the area. Named after Morris K. Jesup, President of the railroad line at the time.	2,634	33	\$57,667
Winthrop		"The Friendliest Town for Miles Around"	Established in 1857. Origin of name unknown.	848	38	\$53,311
Manchester		"Family, Community, Opportunity."	Founded in 1850. Named the county seat and is the largest community in Delaware County.	6,113	37.3	\$45,789
Oelwein		"Hub of Northeast Iowa"	Founded in 1872. Named after Gustav Oelwein who purchased the land which was laid out in a cornfield.	6,261	42.9	\$39,919
Waterloo		"In Waterloo, we're working for you."	Settled in 1845. Originally called "Prairie Rapids Crossing." Supplanted name "Waterloo" comes from the naming of the first post office in town.	68,366	35.6	\$38,902
Cedar Falls		"Our Citizens are Our Business"	Settled in 1845. Originally named "Sturgis Falls" until bought from William Sturgis and named after the Cedar River.	40,859	26.5	\$50,458
Cedar Rapids		"City of Five Seasons"	Established in 1838. Named after the rapids in the Cedar River along the town's land.	129,195	36.4	\$49,809
Dubuque		"Masterpiece on the Mississippi"	Settled in 1833 and named after Julien Dubuque, the town served as the first permanent European settlement.	58,436	38.1	\$44,824

* Source: www.city-data.com



Research shows that the tax rates for the cities of Manchester, Oelwein, and Waterloo are HIGHER than Independence, while their median household incomes reported are LOWER.

ASSESSMENT: COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

blueprint - LEVEL 3 - Independence - October 2016

MAJOR EMPLOYERS	RESIDENTIAL TAX RATE/\$1000*	SOCIAL MEDIA	MAJOR EVENTS & DATES	UNIQUE CITY FEATURES
Tyson Foods Geater Machining and Manufacturing Pries Enterprises Wopsi Valley Creamery	\$15.39	FB - 1240 Chomber FB - 1170 Police FB - 2263 ChamberYT - 5	4th of July - Jul 3-5 / Indee Zombi Run - Oct 29 / Brew BQ - Aug 27 / Buchanan County Fair / Farmers Market - Sat from May-Oct / Friday Night Live @5 - 3 Fridays per summer / Indee Cruise-meisters - 1st Sat In June / R.A.S.H. Ride - June 11 / Riverside Cinema	many parks / Wapsipinicon Mill / Independence Day Celebration / Friday Night Live @5 / RiversEDGE / Absolutely Indee group / disc golf course / adopt a park
Jesup Community School District	\$14.83	FB-343 Chamber FB - 118	Farmers Days - July 7-9 Lion's Club Car Cruise - June 5	6 parks / city-wide garage sales / 12 specialty shops / in both Buchanan County and Black Hawk County / operates 3 rural schools for the Amish community
East Buchanan Community School District	\$8.37	N/A	Winthrop Days - Fathers' Day Weekend	C & C Club / disc golf course / hometown of Michelle Monaghan
Evide Technologies Regional Medical Center Henderson Products Rockwell Collins West Delaware Community School District	\$15.57	FB - 114 Chomber FB - 780 Police FB - 3765	Riverfest - June 18 / Delaware County Fair - Jul 11-17 / Bacon and Hops Festival - Aug 13 / Rhubarb Fest - 1st Sat in June / Farmers Market - Sat from May-Oct / First Friday @5 - 1st Fri In June & Aug / Franklin St. Movie Night - Sept 4	Whitewater Park / community gardens / 3 miles of paved trails / annual scarecrow contest / located on Maquoketa River / adopt a park or flower bed / haunted barn / hosts Hartwick Huskys practices / 7 parks / aquatic center / called "Heart of the Golden Triangle" for equal distance between CR, Dubuque & Waterloo
Mercy Hospital Ashley Industrial Molding Grandview Healthcare & Rehab Transco Railway Products WS Live	\$18.12	Chamber FB - 1249 Police FB - 2031	Oelwein Celebration (Color Oelwein with Pride) - 1st Sat in June / Old Tyme Christmas - 1st Fri/Sat in Dec / Fall Fling - Sept 24 / Party in the Park Summer Series - 2nd Thurs Jun-Sept / Farmers Market - Mon/Fri May-Oct / Friday Night Downtown Park'n - 3rd Fri In summer months / Heritage Days - 3rd wtd in Aug	aquatic center / East Penn Manufacturing expansion - 250 state incentivized jobs / has a City Ombudsman / 11 parks / wellness center / performing arts center / Trees Forever Program / housing incentives - waived fees, free service, tax abatement, activity season passes / Shop Oelwein...We're Awesome campaign / Positively Oelwein group / Spiffy Awards
John Deere Covenant Medical Center Tyson Fresh Meats Allen Memorial Hospital Waterloo Community Schools	\$17.60	Police FB - 4915 Travel Waterloo FB - 9197 Travel Waterloo Tw - 330	My Waterloo Days - June 8-12 / Friday/Loo Summer Concert Series - biweekly Fri May-Sept / National Cattle Congress Fair - Sept 15-18 / Farmers Markets - Sat from May-Oct / Riverloop Rhythms - biweekly Fri May-Sept / BBQ Loo and Blues loo - Jul 15-16	Last Island / Isle Casino / City Council live broadcast / public access studio / Cedar Valley Sportsplex / 2 semi pro teams / cohesive event names (BBQ Loo, Friday/Loo...) / Main Street Waterloo group / National Wrestling Hall of Fame / Riverloop / National Cattle Congress / "Find a Park" web feature / OHV park / Cedar River access / George Wyth State Park / Dig Waterloo campaign / Open 4 Business competition
UNI Cedar Falls Community School District The CBE Group Target Regional Distribution Center Viking Pump	\$11.21	FB - 484 Police FB - 823 Tw - 421	Sturgis Fats - June 24-26 / Movies Under the Moon - biweekly Fri May-Sept / Paddle in the Park - biweekly Fri May-Sept / College Hill Farmers Market - Thurs Jun-Sept / Cedar Falls Farmers Market - Sat May-Oct / Gran Fondo Bike Ride and Fondofest - 3rd Sat In Aug / Hops on Main - 2nd Thurs in Apr / ARTapalooza - 1st Sat after Labor Day	UNI / unique Main Street / IA's first gigabit city / extensive trail system, including paddler's trail / 35 parks and playgrounds / live broadcast of City Council meetings / College Hill / hosts state football championships / Gallagher Bloodom PAC / Community Main Street Group / Cedar River Access
Rockwell Collins Transamerica Unity Point Health St. Luke's Hospital Cedar Rapids Community School District Nordstrom Direct	\$15.21	FB - 3352 Police FB - 9065 Tw - 119 YT - 14	Freedom Festival - late Jun/early July	General Mills / Quaker Oats / US Cellular Center / Cedar River access / strong Czech heritage / 4 semi pro teams / Paramount Theatre / trampoline park / 5 Seasons sid team / 10 splash pads / 24 miles of trails / Hawkaye Downs Speedway / notable celebrities / close proximity to Amana Colonies / 6 colleges/satellites / part of Iowa's Creative Corridor
John Deere Dubuque Community School District Mercy Medical Center Medical Associates Clinic Unity Point Health Finley Hospital	\$11.16	FB - 1626 Tw - 142 YT - 44	Lighted Boat Parade - 1st Sat In Aug / Dancing with the Stars Chomber event / Diversity Summit / DubuqueFest Fine Arts Festival - mid May	Mississippi River access / 5 colleges / The Jule food route transportation / 50/50 Tree Shore Program / Port of Dubuque Marina and Mississippi Riverwalk / kayak, SUP and bike rentals / river tours / Distinctively Dubuque newcomer program / arts generate \$42.5 million in annual economic activity / Art on the River display / City Life program / Impact! Dubuque group / Young Entrepreneurs Academy

* Source: Iowa
Department of
Management



ASSESSMENT



Brand Advocacy Rating



BRAND ADVOCACY: PROMOTERS, PASSIVES, & DETRACTORS

The brand advocacy rating is the most powerful general indicator of your brand's strength.

On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being "not at all likely" and 5 being "extremely likely," residents were asked to rank how likely they would be to recommend living in Independence, working in Independence, and visiting Independence. Responses were arranged into 3 groups: promoters, passives, and detractors.



promoters: those who positively market the brand and lead to growth



passives: those who are satisfied, but not necessarily loyal and can be lured to other brands



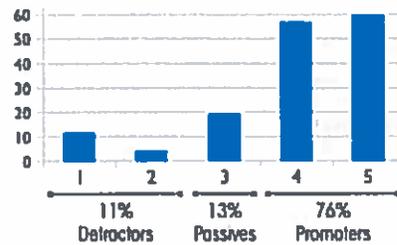
detractors: those who are damaging to the brand and can cause decline

The brand advocacy rating is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters in each category and then averaging the sum of those percentages. It is estimated that the national community average score* ranges from a 50% to 70% positive brand advocacy rating. Independence's brand advocacy rating is 31%.

*Source: "The One Number You Need to Grow," Frederick F. Reichheld, Harvard Business Review 2003



Living in Independence

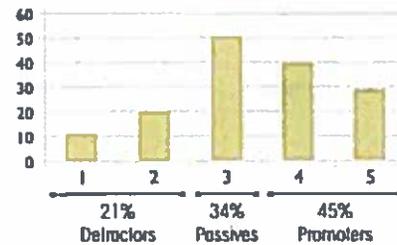


65%

key observations:

In all 3 categories, the community has more promoters than detractors. This is a clear indicator of community pride. Although the overall advocacy rating is low, it is not beyond hope to see a quick turnaround with proper action.

Working in Independence

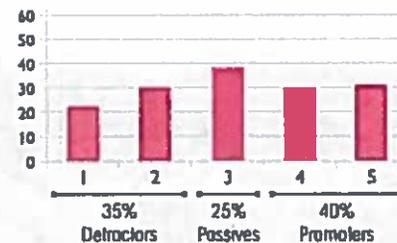


24%

"Working in" has a great opportunity to be turned into a stronger rating.

This would basically require winning the high percentage of passives into the promoter category.

Visiting Independence



5%

"Visiting" is the most detrimental to the overall brand advocacy rating.

Educating residents on the value of tourism in the area, why people visit, and what assets can be utilized to attract visitors, will help to better this score.

31%



Independence's Brand Advocacy Rating is below the national community average

ASSESSMENT



SWOT Analysis

+ strengths

community character

- Independence's name and its strong ties to freedom and patriotism
- proud display of history
- core group of volunteers
- friendly, fun community
- customer service at local businesses
- small town feel
- focus on being active

amenities & resources

- numerous historical aspects
- vast green space - large residential yards and parks
- the Wapsipinicon river and beautiful scenery
- abundance of recreational opportunities
- emergency preparedness
- buying fresh and local
- superior telecom
- remodeled library
- new junior/senior high school
- hospital expansion

tourism

- motor speedway
- 4th of July Celebration
- start of unique store lineup
- abundance of parks and recreation spaces

city promotion

- current and engaging City and Chamber website

location

- on U.S. 20, close to Interstate 380
- Cedar Falls, Waterloo, Cedar Rapids, all within 45 minutes
- in close proximity to multiple major metropolitan areas like Chicago & Minneapolis
- high levels of through traffic in business district

Key points of your brand assessment have been compiled to identify the community of Independence's unique Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

■ weaknesses

services & entertainment

- small restaurant variety
- limited retail selection
- lack of activities for teenagers
- inconsistent/limited store hours
- little nightlife entertainment

upkeep

- deteriorating storefronts downtown
- high number of underutilized parks

community negativity

- older resident pushback
- negative C.A.V.E. people
- perception of taxes
- limited city transparency
- disconnect between residents as well as between Chamber and local businesses
- lack of collaboration amongst business owners
- inconsistency in Chamber leadership
- lack of new volunteers

city promotion

- limited brand awareness
- indistinct identity (logo, positioning, branding)
- minimal promotion of events
- minimal participation in events
- lack of cohesive vision for community
- limited promotional materials for amenities and businesses
- limited presence on social media platforms
- outdated signage

economic outlook

- lack of cohesive vision for downtown
- inability to attract young professionals
- limited job opportunities
- competition with larger surrounding cities
- residents and commuters spending money outside of Independence

ASSESSMENT



SWOT Analysis

opportunities

revitalize downtown business

- get local business owners to work together
- improve storefronts and set an example for the community
- develop and implement a common theme for the downtown area
- continuance of unique stores & shops
- build/strengthen existing businesses

education & transparency

- educate residents on 'high property tax' perception
- keep City & Chamber websites and social media accounts up-to-date
- identify ways to assist in attracting and recruiting new: beneficial businesses, cultural activities, recreational opportunities, and entertainment options
- ensure all organized cultural events display the unique character of the City and its residents
- stronger promotion for City and events

shift mentality & perception

- strengthen collaboration between young and old
- show the value of progress to resistant types
- give business owners and residents a brand to rally behind
- develop events that bring diverse groups of people together
- create a connection with the brand through the City's streetscape

build on assets

- expand on the active lifestyle of residents and continue to implement healthy lifestyle components
- utilize the riverfront
- develop larger events and activities
- promote and use City parks more effectively



threats

surrounding communities

- growth of surrounding communities closer to Waterloo, Cedar Falls, and Cedar Rapids
- Cedar Falls, Waterloo and Cedar Rapids have a direct effect on many happenings within Independence
- continued migration of youth for education and career opportunities

negative perceptions

- property taxes being perceived as extremely high are causing people to live elsewhere
- 'us vs them' perception toward City government

struggling leadership

- inability to work together threatens progress - groups not seeing the value of change
- inability to maintain a Chamber director
- same volunteers putting on events year after year

Top things to work on:

What are the prevailing observations? (COMBINING RESEARCH AND BLUESPACE ASSESSMENTS)



brand positioning

brand experience

brand championing

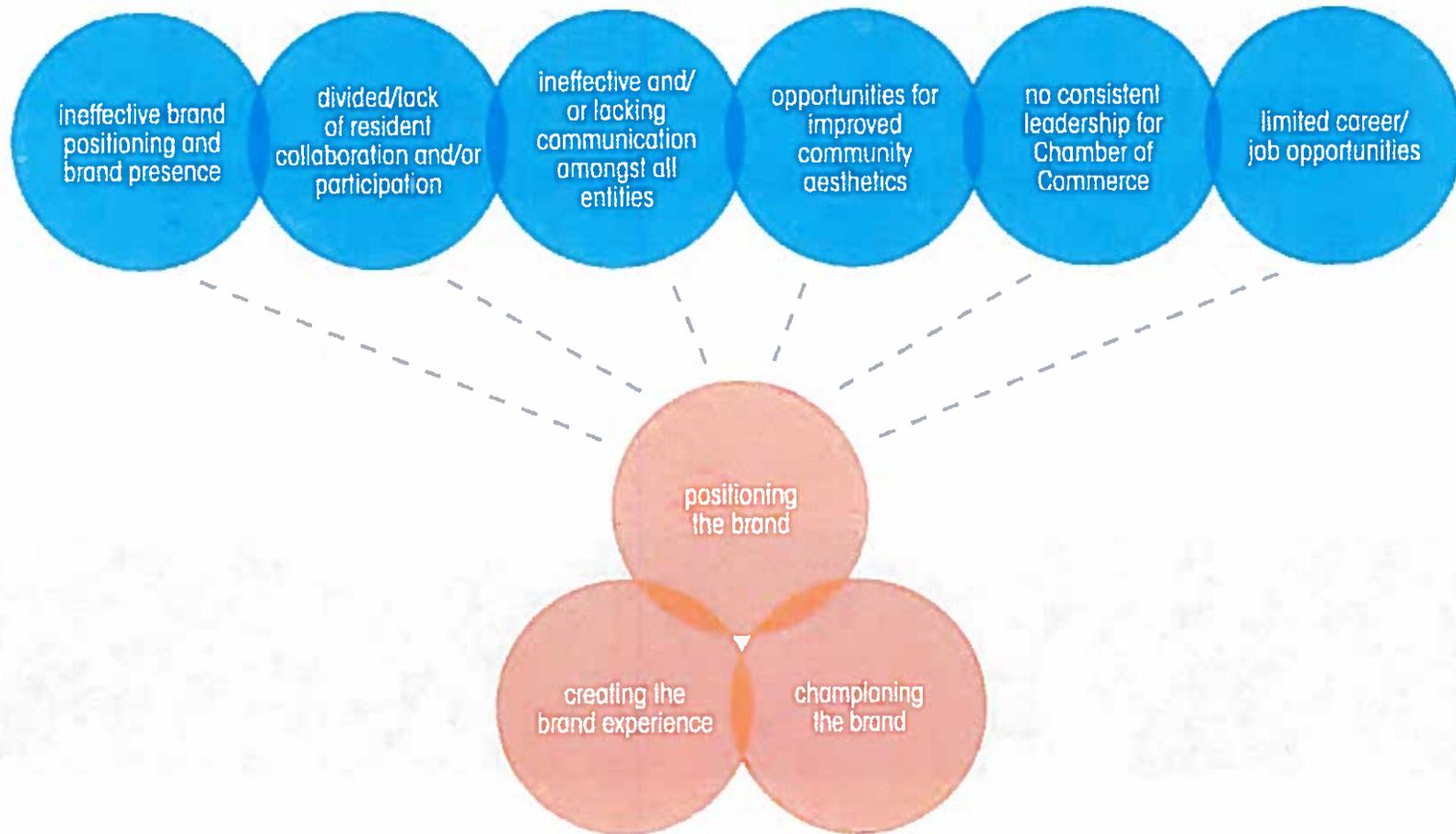
CONCLUSION:

While the City of Independence boasts a unique landscape, small town feel, and many positive attributes and assets, its lack of identity creates strong barriers in achieving positioning, progress, and a unified community.

STRATEGY



Where do we go from here?



“ Start by doing what’s necessary, then do what’s possible, and suddenly...
you are doing the impossible.”

- Francis of Assisi

🎯 STRATEGY GOALS

- work to create belief system and increase community buy-in
- revitalize community pride and outlook
- invite new resources: residents, businesses, and visitors

The following pages outline strategies to establish a cohesive brand message and vision for the community of Independence. Creative ideas and realistic recommendations are presented to ensure strength, consistency, and overall effectiveness.

📊 METHODS

- create a distinct brand message that sincerely represents the community
- maintain the current unique qualities and positive brand perceptions
- provide realistic and cost-effective recommendations
- increase resident pride and awareness
- promote community assets using the revived brand
- support the brand message through the community’s physical attributes
- invite businesses that support the brand message
- provide means to maintain the brand
- actively seek positive exposure
- monitor results and remain proactive

BRAND ESSENCE



Who is Independence?

Independence stands for **SPiRiT**.

It is clear that INDEPENDENCE is a community rich in resources, amenities, and a tight sense of family. Independence's very name bears the traits of strength, fortitude, and purpose.

It projects a town that will stand strong through the tests of time; constant in its efforts to remain relevant in the eyes of its residents, visitors, and surrounding communities.

So how do we ensure that the City of Independence, Iowa, lives up to the image of its name? How do we use the spirit of a community to build a powerful brand?

build upon the qualities that you already possess

Your brand is not your logo, your positioning statement, or your mission. It's not the colors you choose or the materials you use to promote your city. Your brand is who you are to the people that should care about you. Your brand is how people feel about you.

create an experience

From the moment a person hears your name, to their first glimpse of your signage and marketing materials, to every interaction they have with your community members, there is an opportunity to create a positive experience.

commit to a vision and rally your community around it

A brand is something that has to be honed and monitored over time to ensure it retains its strength and impact. Your brand is best reflected by the people that live it.

Brand essence embodies how people emotionally connect with a brand. It is the intangible heart and soul of a brand, easily grasped and simply obvious.

“A brand is a living entity—and it is enriched or undermined cumulatively over time, the product of a thousand small gestures.” — Michael Eisner

POSITIONING THE BRAND



How do we create a strong presence amidst surrounding communities?

In Independence **WE STAND STRONG.**

Independence's current messaging works to convey a sense of community pride and unity, promote progress, and build upon this country's fame.

Unfortunately, the intent falls short.

What do they mean by "Have a play date with us?" What are we supposed to "serve" with them? A creative attempt is made with use of multiple words beginning with the letter "P," but again, there is no feeling behind it. With messages that come across as disjointed and empty, there is nothing to hold on to; nothing memorable; and the result is that it passes through our senses and leaves just as quickly as it came.

give the brand a voice

Positioning the brand in the marketplace means giving the brand a voice and personifying it. Who is the Independence brand? What does it look like? What does it wear? How does it speak and act? Think here of those residents, business owners and community leaders that champion Independence. What is it about Independence that they promote? Why do they love Independence? Why do they want other people to love it too?

create a "sticky" brand

Creating that voice requires a cohesive message; a unity among the tangibles and the intangibles. The brand message, when delivered effectively through actions, words, and decisions, will make a home in the minds and hearts of the people that should care about it. Suddenly, Independence's voice is heard; and more importantly, the brand is remembered.

stand out amongst surrounding communities

Independence is within close proximity to larger communities that offer amenities that Independence currently does not. How can Independence set itself apart from these communities, and instead of competing with them, use them as an asset?

Small changes in messaging and execution will make big changes to the visitor's perception.

Spirit isn't just a facade. In Independence, it's a feeling.

BRAND FOUNDATION:

positioning statement (to develop)

It is critical to define a positioning statement that encompasses the Independence brand. This statement will become the pledge of the community, communicating the benefits of living in, working in, and visiting Independence. It will work to differentiate Independence from surrounding communities and can be modified for adoption by the Chamber of Commerce and other city organizations.

logo development (to develop)

Your logo is one of the strongest visual cues of your brand that instantly communicates your brand's message to all who come in contact with it. A successful logo will be:

- professional
- highly distinguishable
- easily reproduced across a wide range of mediums

brand standards guide (to develop)

This guide will become invaluable to all who will market Independence: residents, visitors, business owners, city officials, chamber members, and outside vendors. This reference will detail what Independence stands for and how best to communicate that through various media forms. Many key brand elements, such as fonts, colors, and voice will be created at this stage. The amendable brand standards guide may have the following potential inclusions:

- defining the brand (what the community of Independence stands for)
- brand communication standards (the voice of Independence, how to - and how not to - write or speak about the brand)
- positioning statement usage
- logo usage (various orientations, minimum size, negative space etc.)
- font styles (supporting font families & usage)
- brand/community colors palette (primary & secondary colors)
- community design elements
- photography/design styles
- electronic media guidelines

POSITIONING THE BRAND (cont.)

MARKETING FOUNDATION MATERIALS:

stationery collateral/electronic media

Basic communications pieces are prime, everyday opportunities to solidify the brand.

- business cards
- letterhead (printed and electronic)
- envelopes
- folders
- email signatures
- eNewsletters

advertising/promotion

In all advertising and promotion, it is of the utmost importance to speak the voice of the brand and project high quality standards across the board.

- print/digital advertising
- signage
- high quality photography/video
- promotional materials, including visitors guide and economic development recruiting brochure

online presence

It is crucial to have an online presence that is easily found and user-friendly. The City and Chamber websites are the first impression for nearly all potential visitors and entrepreneurs.

- Cohesive websites that are reflective of the brand voice will create recognition, interest, and increased use. The websites should be used to unify the communications of all community entities to be effective as a whole. Adding links to social media pages and consistently updating content will also increase SEO effectiveness.
- tracking monthly webstats and monitoring visitor interactions will ensure content is being delivered in the most effective manner and that the site is being easily navigated

 This symbol indicates a critical project that bluespace recommends be handled by your professional branding agency, ensuring strategic design standards are met and pieces are developed that act as an extension of the established brand



social media

Social media has become an invaluable tool to form or redefine a community's image and establish a brand voice.

- management of social media pages ensures brand unity, and provides consistent updates that create a constant presence with your audience
- include information on all community news and events
- initiate "I grew up in Independence" posts and conversation
- utilize software to track brand mentions, post impressions and interactions, as well as competitor posts to ensure that Independence stays responsive and connected with its followers

publicity/media exposure

Seeking publicity and media exposure is not only a low to no cost way to gain exposure, but also lends legitimacy and credibility to the brand.

- associating the brand with sympathetic causes will gain exposure for the community, as well as enhance its reputation
- Monthly media releases can be used to promote significant community happenings. Media releases can also be repurposed for SEO (search engine optimization).
- Displaying and adding to a list of Independence's awards, titles, and achievements is a great way to keep the community's accomplishments top-of-mind. Posting this list on social media pages and community websites will reinforce Independence's assets.

CREATING THE BRAND EXPERIENCE



How do we capture mindshare?

Independence. YOU'LL MAKE MEMORIES HERE.

Now that people have seen the icons and heard the voice of Independence's brand, it is vital to create unique, engaging experiences. Generating brand "touchpoints" is a way to ensure that anyone who encounters Independence has memorable experiences that get shared.

utilizing touchpoints

Touchpoints are any point of contact between a resident, visitor, business owner, entrepreneur, etc. and the Independence brand. Touchpoints can range from a glimpse of a billboard promoting Independence as someone passes by, to a first experience with your website, to lunch by the Wapsi river, and even the greeting they are met with when they place a call to a local business.

brand interaction

A community holds a multitude of opportunities for people to experience their brand. Creating a unique experience at every point of interaction is an unmatched opportunity to set the brand apart. The interactions people have with a brand is the determining factor in whether or not they continue to subscribe to it.

On the following pages, suggestions are offered on how to create several positive and memorable experiences with the Independence brand.

Creating unique, memorable brand touchpoints will enhance perceptions and get people talking. In Independence, new experiences become traditions.

entry/directional signage

Intriguing and easy to read entry signage will help increase the amount of visitors, as well as help to discover Independence's assets. Directional signage may help increase the amount of time people spend in Independence, as well as create a desire to return.

- 1. design attractive and more inviting signage at entrances
 - display assets and unique statements on sequential billboards to spark interest in Independence well before visitors arrive
- 2. install unique, branded wayfinding signage to attractions and assets



Over 6,700 vehicles per day utilize 1st Street. Use of creative signage could be used to help direct some of that traffic to the downtown retail areas.

CONSIDER THIS

As you drive down Hwy 20 you see a billboard that calls out a unique quality of Independence. A few miles later you see another related billboard that provides another callout. You begin to think of the previous billboard and start to anticipate seeing another. Consider utilizing what is commonly referred to as a "Burma-Shave Campaign." Using sequential billboards will keep the thought of Independence in the mind of a passerby for a longer period of time, while also capturing mindshare. The same could be done along 220th street, and because of the high number of vehicles per day there could be attempts at temporary signage or daily signage to pull in visitors on short notice. Businesses could display banners on the side of the road that read, "Sale at Hardware Hank's! This weekend only!"



CREATING THE BRAND EXPERIENCE (cont.)

aesthetic improvement

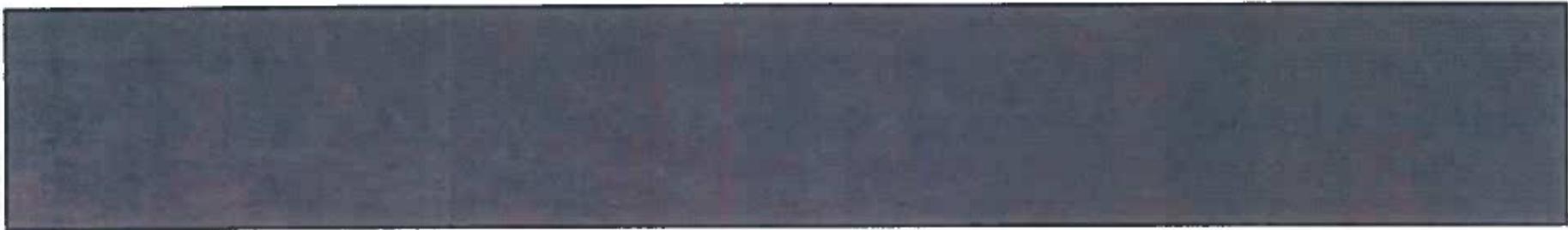
An impression can be formed in mere seconds. A clean and well-kept community sends a huge message: "WE CARE."

- adopt-a-block community clean-up contest
- pursue grant money for community art projects such as building murals
- Continue applying for state-funded revitalization projects. If denied in the past, seek help in finding a solution.
- create programs to help residents with exterior maintenance and upkeep for their homes
- increase the number of benches downtown. Benches can be "sponsored" by community members wishing to donate in memoriam, etc.
- Existing trash cans in the downtown area should be emptied on a regular basis. An increase in the number of trash cans may help to decrease the amount of trash on the streets and in stairwells - see pg. 65
- create a committee dedicated to cleaning up vacant downtown retail spaces - see pg. 66

CONSIDER THIS

Picture a row of benches conveniently placed along the stretch of businesses downtown. The style and color of the benches themselves provide another strategic opportunity to act as an extension of the revived brand by utilizing Independence's streetscape. The conveyed feel of the brand is not the only benefit the benches can provide; allowing opportunities for shoppers to take a load off can increase the amount of time they spend shopping and the number of stores they go to. Benefiting the overall cost of a project like this is the opportunity for the benches to be "sponsored" by community members wishing to donate in memoriam, etc.





CONSIDER THIS

There are many opportunities for murals around town, most of which can be created inexpensively through the help of the residents or local artists. The mural locations could range from alleyways, to abandoned business windows, to sides of buildings. This project can bring the community together to add vivid new life, build pride and support community art. Grants exist to help fund public art projects, and can help cover material and professional labor expenses.



CREATING THE BRAND EXPERIENCE (cont.)

shopping

There are many opportunities to create positive experiences for shoppers that live in Independence, as well as those that come from surrounding communities.

- consistent/convenient store hours
- attract businesses that offer items that are not adequately available in Independence - see pg. 32
- enhance the growing specialty store trend by adding more unique item stores to the current lineup
- a Chamber-led "Shop Independence First" campaign would help keep residents aware of all the great shopping options that are available in Independence
- businesses should consider working with the Chamber to offer promotional programs to Independence patrons who frequent establishments (i.e. "green" shopping bag, retail happy hours, etc.)

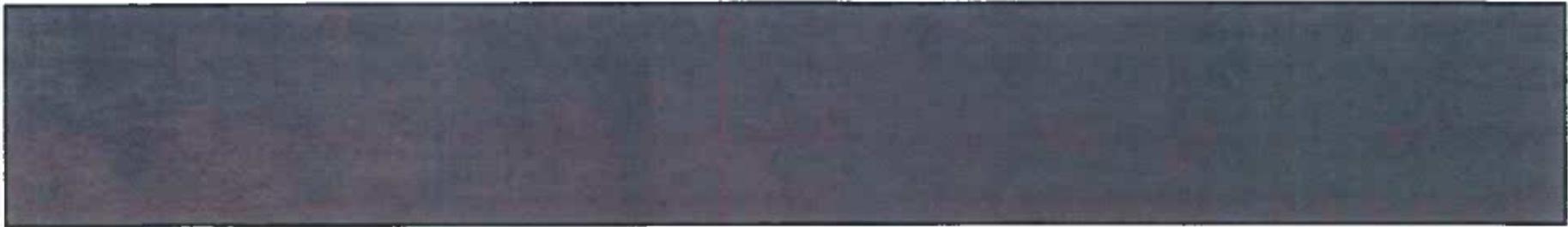


Over 70% of residents responded NO when asked if they could buy what they needed in Independence. Over half of them said that clothing & shoes were the #1 item they could not buy.

CONSIDER THIS

Promotional programs are a great way to increase foot traffic downtown. Imagine the Chamber selling reusable shopping bags that when used at local businesses, would entitle residents and visitors to special savings or discounts. To be cost effective, Chamber members and other participating businesses could pay to have their names/logos printed on the bags.





a guide to Independence

This user-friendly piece will market the many resources of the community to more than just visitors. Containing dining, shopping, attractions, a useful map and more, this guide can also be distributed to current residents and commuters to increase local pride and commerce.

- consider offering coupons/specials that can only be found in the guide
- present materials in an organized manner for a professional feel vs. just throwing items in an envelope
- be sure to represent businesses, resources, and assets/amenities accurately
- Make the guide readily available at various locations for those passing through town. Provide a link on the City and Chamber websites to request a packet or download an online version.

attract new business

Creating awareness of growth opportunities will help to draw in new businesses and entrepreneurs.

-  Work to revitalize the downtown corridor. This will entice and create an energy that businesses will want to be a part of.
- create a betterment committee that will work to uphold the condition, look, and feel of the downtown area
- accent empty storefronts with positive messaging, such as "Coming Soon!" or "Great Space Available!"
- downtown beautification projects should extend to include areas in front of vacant buildings, presenting a vibrant streetscape that relates to the revived brand
- Support and provide opportunities for entrepreneurs by simplifying/expediting the business start-up process. Create a link that explains the steps and actions new business owners will need to take and who they will need to contact.

CREATING THE BRAND EXPERIENCE (cont.)

build upon the active/ outdoor lifestyle

Create opportunities for people to gather and enjoy Independence's assets. This also creates the opportunity for word of mouth exposure amongst outdoor enthusiasts from other communities.

- Hold a community run or triathlon unique to Independence. Possibly build an event around a significant historical happening in Independence.
- create additional bike trails/connect existing trails to invite traffic from surrounding communities
- create designated areas such as docks or piers along the river to allow more interaction with the water

CONSIDER THIS

Developing additional community gathering areas or natural space amongst new and existing developments is key to ensuring Independence makes the most of its natural assets. Imagine a pier that extends into the river, creating a unique space for residents and visitors to come together and enjoy the experience of being on the water.





standout with something special

This is where you really have the opportunity to shine. Independence has many possibilities when it comes to creating unique experiences.

- Construct a monument/wall where residents can be acknowledged for their time spent living in Independence. Family names can be gilded stars after their residency surpasses a specific increment of years.
- consider promoting the history of Independence by establishing monuments in various places around town and starting a guided "history walk" to educate residents and visitors
- host events centered around ceremonial flag raising such as Flag Day, Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, etc., where citizen contributions, community leadership, and/or special achievements are recognized by announcing and giving that person/family the privilege of raising the flag



CONSIDER THIS

One way to commemorate the community pride of residents and business owners is to engrave it into a monument or a wall that will live on forever. Picture a list of names that depict the longevity in which a family has resided in Independence or the number of years a business has been established within the community. Recognizing this longevity will surely underline the commitment people and entities have toward the community and in turn may create a higher number of brand champions.



CREATING THE BRAND EXPERIENCE (cont.)

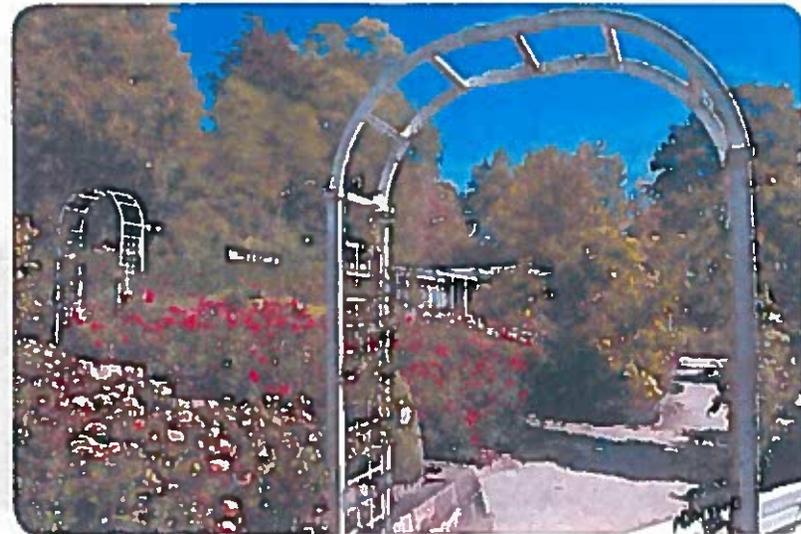
accentuate your assets

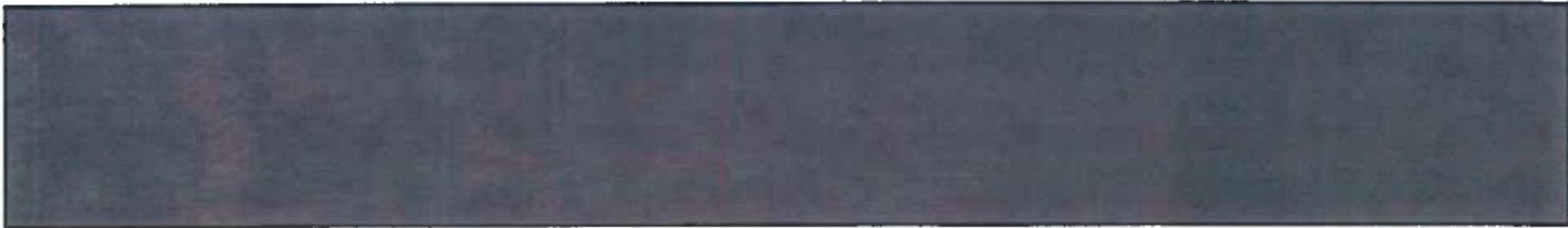
Make a statement by turning ordinary spaces into extraordinary places.

- rename and create unique events centered around unused or underutilized park areas
- turn underutilized green space areas into additional community gardens or self-guided garden walks
- Expand on already popular and well-known events such as the 4th of July Celebration. Initiate new activities and entertainment like a flyby or a contest for best 4th of July family tradition.
- Light the mill to create an energy around one of the community's most prized landmarks. Light up the bridge near the mill so that it shines down on the river, highlighting another asset prized by the community.

CONSIDER THIS

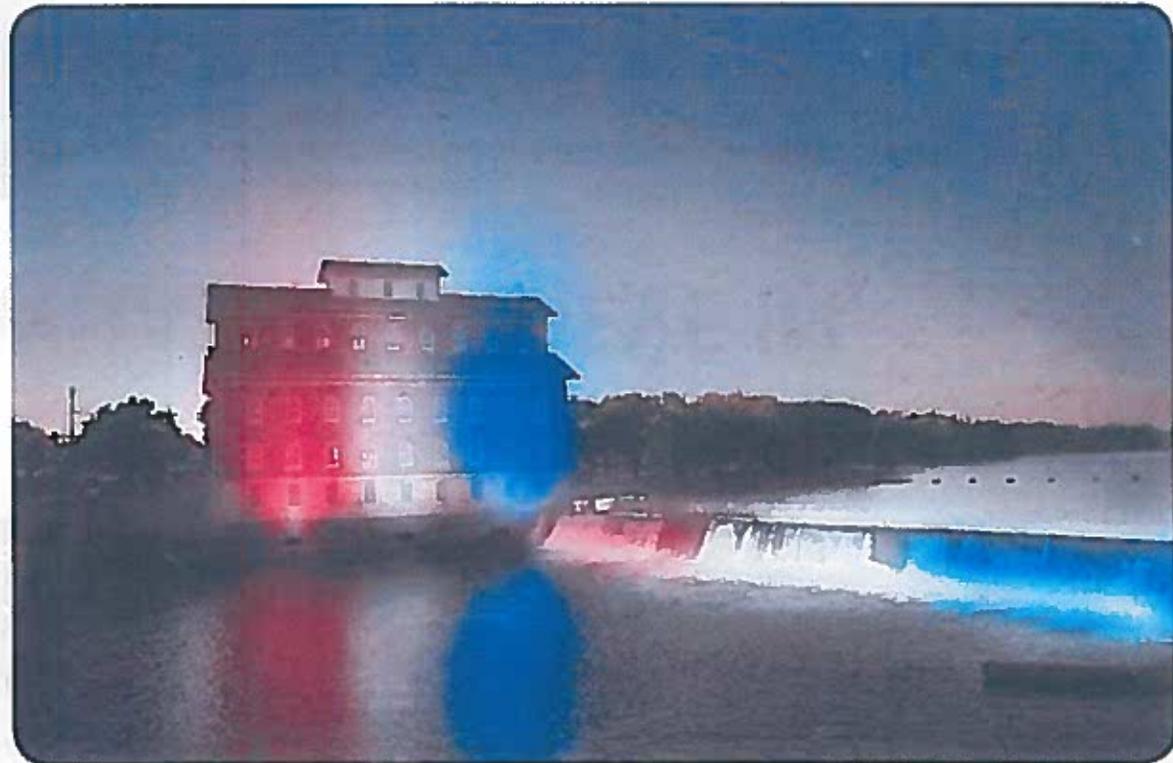
With the abundance of green space that Independence has, there is great opportunity to create a low budget garden walk. The garden walk itself could be a living icon of the community's strength, closeness, and beauty. A gift program put on by the city could gift additional flowers and trees based on the addition of new residents or businesses as a symbol of their addition to the community. The garden walk could provide an opportunity to create new volunteer groups that maintain its condition, or even provide educational opportunities for children in the summer to learn about gardening. It's an ongoing project that can be as large or as small as budgets allow, with nearly endless possibilities for brand reinforcement and meaningful community rituals.





CONSIDER THIS

Lighting ceremonies can set the mood for the community; whether it be for an event, holiday, or for the mark of a new season. Not only will the lights energize the residents and visitors who see them, they will also assist in showing off some of Independence's unique features and strong points.



CHAMPIONING THE BRAND



How do we unify the brand?

Our Spirit is **WHAT WE BELIEVE IN.**

For Independence, this is the most important component to your brand's success. It is critical that the residents, business owners, community leaders, and City officials understand the story of Independence, believe in the message they are sending, and become strong and steadfast promoters of the brand.

brand champions

The members of the community of Independence are its strongest ambassadors. In order for residents to rally behind its community, there must be strong communication, cooperation, and trust.

It is crucial that every person is equipped with a roadmap that precisely defines Independence's destination in order to explain why and how to deliver Independence's message. Making a conscious effort to abide by the brand guidelines will create a full understanding of who Independence is and what it stands for, which is the first step in cultivating an army of brand champions!

Powerful brands resonate from within.
To rise as one community, we must believe in who we are.

brand belief system

Defining the internal belief system will help community members understand the story of Independence, and the importance of buy-in.

- 1. refine creation story to connect to the brand essence
(Your creation story should embody who you are, and why. The backstory of a brand fulfills an innate human desire to learn how a brand came to be.)
- 2. develop a community creed
(define, in one singular idea, what it is that differentiates Independence and motivates people to believe in the brand)
- work to establish an understanding of Independence's positioning amongst surrounding communities; define who Independence is and who Independence is not
- develop and preserve rituals that create accountability and a feeling of belonging (i.e. every day at 8:00 a.m. an American Flag is raised at the Mill; research and possibly reinstate rituals from the town's beginning; work to embody new rituals surrounding certain community events)

“We have a great community but lack of effort by community members and govt to make it better.”

- Resident

CHAMPIONING THE BRAND (cont.)

improved communication

Members of the community have repeatedly remarked about the lack of communication between City officials and residents, Chamber and business owners, etc.

- increase the Chamber and City's presence on social media to increase awareness about city events and happenings
- newspaper/website/social media section labeled "your tax dollars at work" will help community members feel like they are "in the know" in regard to how their personal contributions are helping to strengthen and improve their community
- events such as a Chamber coffee, held monthly, give Chamber members and new businesses the opportunity to network and become well-known amongst their peers
- make resources such as "community voice" on the current city website, known, and easy to use

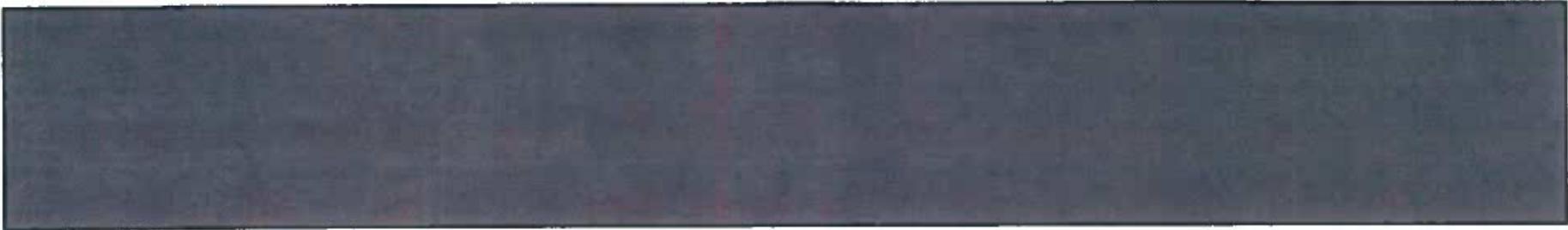
squelch negative perceptions

There will always be community members who are resistant to change and will make it their mission to detract from the brand. There are several ways to diminish the effects of negative perceptions.

- create opportunities to educate the public regarding property taxes
- Bring residents out of the dark when it comes to city meetings and events. Create opportunities for involvement and easy access to information.
- develop a committee that is dedicated to the unity of Independence; promoting communication and making efforts to focus on issues facing all individuals and groups within the community
- Cherry-pick 5 brand stewards; residents of Independence that embody the brand and understand what the brand is. Isolate them, educate them, make sure they can act as an extension of the brand. Do this so they can not only police it, but build more brand champions.
- Make sure the "cheers" are louder than the "jeers"



73.1% of residents say they receive information about city government via social media.



get the community involved

Involvement in the community will create feelings of pride, belief, and a sense of belonging.

- create events centered around cleaning/ painting/raising money for community projects
- publicly recognize and put community members in the spotlight for exceptional promotion of Independence or community involvement, with a column in the paper that covers the movements and happenings related to volunteers, followed up by a post on social media
- use citizen talents and make them shine
- Create a database of willing volunteers. The City should seek to work with schools and get students involved. Re-energizing and re-invigorating the community should be viewed as an exciting and important opportunity.



79.2% of residents say they'd be willing or likely to volunteer. 60.7% say the reason they don't is due to time limitations.

job opportunities

Creating new jobs will draw people to Independence; successful business ventures will gain excitement and word of mouth exposure.

-  start a campaign to expose vacant buildings ripe for entrepreneurs
- conduct a poll to see what type of businesses residents and visitors would like to see in Independence
- create unique experiences around new business startups that keep them loyal to Independence



35.3% of former residents say the primary reason they moved away from Independence was because of job opportunities.

Establishing a clear, consistent message that Independence is spirited, progressive, and strong, will provide residents and visitors alike something to believe in and continuously work toward.

Support and buy-in of that message will ignite a desire to live in, work in, and visit, the flourishing community that Independence is on track to become.

IMMEDIATE ACTION ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED BY bluespace creative, inc.

 brand positioning

arrive at positioning statement that embodies Independence's brand promise

 logo identity

develop unique, instantly recognizable mark that is representative of Independence, across all mediums

 brand guidelines

develop a brand standards guide that will communicate how the Independence brand should be communicated across all platforms

RECOMMENDED ACTION ITEMS 

- Independence guide
- stationary collateral and electronic media
- refine creation story
- community creed
- advertising and promotion
- attractive signage (entry and wayfinding)
- websites/online presence
- social media (Chamber and City)
- monthly media releases
- SEO
- revitalize downtown corridor
- rename and create unique events centered around unused park areas
- campaign to expose vacant buildings to entrepreneurs

“The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith.”

- Franklin D. Roosevelt

