

Twilight Festival

Initially created to let Columbians know that downtown was still alive, Twilight Festival has obviously succeeded in meeting that goal. The significant growth of the Twilight Festival in recent years has made it necessary to reassess the festival's goals and update the brand.

CCA hosted two member meetings to discuss new directions for the Twilight Festival. The plan outlined below is the result of those discussions among members.

Goals

- 1) Showcase *The District*
- 2) Create a positive community experience
- 3) Maintain the integrity of the Twilight Festival brand
- 4) Drive sales (immediate and future)
- 5) Bring new people into *The District*

The Twilight Festival Brand

Although originally intended as a promotion for downtown retailers, Twilight Festival has long since grown into something much more. Having fun, shopping, and going out to eat are key elements of the festival but these activities occur as part of an overall feeling of community.

Although the Twilight Festival certainly boosts our downtown economy and gives us an enormous amount of free publicity, the festival itself has grown into a true community event where people come to see old friends, meet new people, and be a part of something special.

Our survey shows that Twilight Festival attendees value *The District* because it is a fun, active, artistic and unique community. Our festival allows kids to have some fun, showcases some great musicians, encourages walking around and talking with people, and highlights our one-of-a-kind businesses. This is the experience of Twilight Festival—maintain this positive experience and sales will follow.

Twilight is a free event and is widely promoted. As the festival grows, the experience can change—a common occurrence with many types of events. Our goal is to maintain the brand experience as the festival becomes larger or more popular.

To preserve the integrity of the brand, it's important to do several things:

- 1) Schedule activities that highlight the brand's values—a welcoming, fun, artistic community.
- 2) Maintain the quality of activities (particularly music and kids' activities) so that people continue to come and enjoy the festival.
- 3) Create smaller, separate venues to make it easier for people to interact with other community members and with business owners.
- 4) Prevent or reduce activities that distract from the brand.
- 5) Make sure all merchants are aware of these values and that their business is representing these values (ie, that their staff is welcoming, that their in store promotions are fun, etc.)

Target Audiences

The most common answer to this question was “everyone”—which highlights both the strength of the festival and its weakness. Unlike other CCA events that are targeted to a very specific audience and designed to promote a specific group of members, Twilight Festival is the one event that is truly designed to attract a wide range of people to *The District*.

However, you can't plan a festival that appeals to everyone or you end up with an event that appeals to no one. Instead, the key to attracting "everyone" is to create separate venues with narrow appeal to a specific audience.

Intended Audiences:

- Families with children (esp. in June)
- Young professionals (25-30)
- Thirty- and forty-somethings (no young kids or at least no young kids in tow)
- Students (esp. in Sept.)
- Shoppers/diners (higher economic level, same target audience as throughout the year.)
- New residents
- Locals ("rediscover" Twilight)
- Tourists (requirement of major grant)

(Detailed snapshots of our intended audiences are at the end of this document. These snapshots are based on our marketing data and help describe these audiences in terms of demographics. Many of the above categories speak more to how and where we market the festival (ie, in-city v. statewide) rather than to the type of audiences we are marketing to.)

Unintended Audiences:

- Unaccompanied teenagers
- Aggressive non-profits

Festival Venues Designed for Intended Audiences:

1) Kids' Camp

Designed for families and vacationers with kids. Hands-on kids' activities, crawl thru adventures, bouncy houses, music, Flat Branch Film Series, special presentations geared to kids.

2) Large Concert Area

Designed for young professionals and thirty- and forty-somethings, although families would feel comfortable as well. High quality bands that would attract out-of-towners and new residents. Theme-based concerts (like Marching Mizzou on Tiger Twilight) would be an option as well. Closing a street for this concert would put it in the heart of the festival and bring it closer to more of the businesses. A street closure would also signal to long-time attendees that the festival has changed.

3) Sidewalks

Designed for those who see Twilight as an opportunity to stroll, "scout" for merchandise and meet old friends. Street bands and other sidewalk activities encourage people to walk around but more focus can be given to stores and restaurants if they extend activities, merchandise or tables into the sidewalk area.

4) Stores and Restaurants

Although Twilight is an outdoor festival, part of the "celebration" should occur inside the businesses. Most restaurants seem to attract festival-goers and many have adopted activities even better suited to the event (ie, outdoor grilling, portable food.) More needs to be done along these lines with the merchants—either bringing the store to the outside or attracting the people inside.

Potential Festival Venues Designed for Unintended Audiences:

Because the festival is free, widely publicized and large, there will be audiences that don't match our preferred audience. Since these groups will attend regardless, our best option may be to create separate, well-defined venues specifically targeted towards them.

1) Unaccompanied teenagers

Problem areas are Courthouse Square and some sections of Ninth Street. Immediate responses would be to either close off problem areas or program activities that will attract more of our intended audience to this area. Both solutions would prevent a group from taking over an entire part of the festival—diluting the brand experience and driving away our intended audiences.

One positive response would be to host a teen-oriented event in a separate venue in order to attract teens. In the past, Parks and Rec has hosted high school battles of the bands on top of the 6th and Cherry parking garage with much success. Doing something similar to these would essentially mean that we'd be running another event separate from Twilight. Because the staff is already running the main festival, this would need to be organized by a core of volunteers or by Parks and Rec.

2) Non-profits

Although everyone is welcome at Twilight, in recent years the non-profits have eclipsed most other activities. They block the businesses and detract from the sidewalk music—in essence, they water down the brand. Tenth Street is currently designated “Soap Box Street” but a better option would be Cherry—it's longer and fewer businesses front Cherry.

Outreach

Festival outreach is primarily handled by our media sponsors, Cumulus Radio and KMIZ. The advertising and promotions we receive are free and it has certainly helped broaden our reach and increase our attendance. In addition, the CVB does a significant amount of advertising through Missouri and surrounding states for the festival. Because of this assistance we have no internal advertising budget for Twilight. It also means that some media are “off-limits” because they compete with our sponsors. Finally, some types of outreach are not available to us because the institution has decided not to partner with Twilight. (For example, advertising on gas pumps or grocery store receipts may be a good idea but could only come about if the company came on board as an official Twilight Festival partner. Companies benefit from being associated with the Twilight brand so we limit who can use it to sponsors.)

Although we receive a significant amount of traditional advertising support, it's clear that many demographics we seek do not respond to traditional media. Internet, email and other more personalized forms of communication are quickly becoming the only way some people receive their information.

Some possibilities:

1) Upgrade our internet presence.

This is by far the most common way people learn about the festival. Upgrading this by creating a new website devoted to Twilight, creating a Facebook site and developing a special Twilight email list are all good options.

2) Make better use of merchant's mailing lists.

Most merchants have mailing lists and email lists of preferred customers and making Twilight a part of that regular mailing is a great way to pull in a key demographic (ie, regular shoppers and diners.)

- 3) Make more promotional materials available.
Bag stuffers for merchants, postcards or table tents for restaurants and weekly programs in businesses will all help pull regular customers into the festival. It will also strengthen the connection between District businesses and the festival in the minds of the consumer.
- 4) Tie into MU, Stephens and Columbia College better.
We've actually attempted this several times. The most effective tie-in is Tiger Twilight although that attracts more alums than students. We've also attempted a student-only venue for musicians, comedians and theater with varied success. Like the Flat Branch Park venue, this would be a resource-heavy endeavor (at least until it becomes cemented as part of the festival.) The best option would be a committee—perhaps of merchants and students—that puts together a student venue one September night.
- 5) Experiment with new media.
Festival podcasts, using text messages to remind people that it's a Twilight night or that their favorite band is starting—we can start to play around with these forms of outreach.

Specific Actions

2007 Twilight Festival:

- Move all activities out of Courthouse Square.
Our 2006 efforts to reprogram activities in this area did not help with the problems and our office—in conjunction with the CPD—believes the best option is to close the area. An added benefit is that these activities can be relocated to areas closer to more stores and restaurants.
- Move Kids' Camp to Flat Branch Park to consolidate all children's activities.
Flat Branch has become a popular venue with families with kids who like the grassy areas free of traffic. It's also a good way to bring some attention to our members in that area. Families with children are more likely diners than shoppers so having them near member restaurants makes sense.
- Close off Ninth Street from Broadway to Cherry for the Concert Series.
This would accomplish a number of things: program a popular event in an area that's becoming a teen hangout; bring the Concert Series closer to the retail/restaurant core; relieve the most congested sidewalks in the festival; provide a clear message to our "lost" audiences that the festival is different and they should give it another try.

This area was chosen because it was so congested, the street creates a natural amphitheatre and it's a much easier section to close (Broadway is tough, there are no parking garages on this block, and many of the customers in this block are pedestrian and bike based anyway.) This venue can be reassessed after 2007.
- Bring in a new crop of Concert Series bands and upgrade the level of the sidewalk bands.
While good, we tend to schedule the same bands again and again for the Concert Series. We are also a bit too kind when it comes to allowing a local group sidewalk space. If we are seen as an "artistic community" it would help our brand to ensure great bands and ensure a continuous change in the Concert Series lineups. We'll be reducing the number of sidewalk bands, tightening up our selection process and Richard King has agreed to help schedule Concert Series bands.

- Form a merchant committee to create ways to attract customers into their stores.
Most merchants liked the retail focus of the Living Windows Festival. Even though sales may not have been immediate, the stores were the focus. This is a question best answered by the retailers themselves and a committee designed to create some promotional ideas is likely the best route.

Possible outcomes of this could be promotions organized by each block or by stores offering the same type of product (ie, fashion show night or shoe sale night.) This would also be a way to address the concept of themes. For example, the last festival in June could have a patriotic, Fourth of July theme and all the merchants could decorate accordingly. On Tiger Twilight, the stores could decorate their windows in black and gold and give special alumni or student offers.

NOTE: Twilight Festival may not be the best vehicle to accomplish all our retail goals. Although we can shift the focus to the stores, this is not the best format for serious shoppers. Because of this, we've got two new events that will better accomplish this. Gallery Crawl has grown into Artrageous. It will be held 4 times a year and is organized by the galleries with CCA support. CCA has also introduced Spring into Style, a new retail event designed specifically for shoppers.

- Move non-profit participants to Cherry and institute new rules.
Move Soap Box Street to Cherry where there is pedestrian traffic but fewer businesses to harm. Institute new rules that we require all non-profits to follow:
 - 1) Cannot set up in front of an open business, block a business's doors or windows and cannot affix anything to a business.
 - 2) Must set up curbside and allow a minimum of 5 feet between their table and the storefront.
 - 3) Request polite and appropriate behavior towards merchants, festival staff and attendees.

Future Actions

My overall impression from the member meetings was that everyone is fairly happy with the overall idea of Twilight Festival and that it was more a question of updating the event rather than eliminating it. Because of this, 2007 should be a "testing ground" to see what works and what doesn't. Although staff can assess some of the effects of these proposed changes—demographics, general spending habits, turnout—the merchants must also do some assessment to see what works. Best options are in-store or in-restaurant surveys or sales tracking (2006 v. 2007; June v. September, etc.) in order to more objectively evaluate the event.

Some suggestions would require more resources than others (ie, weekly festival themes, pet parades) and can be addressed as part of a post-2007 festival discussion among members where we determine the direction we will take for 2008.