



CITY OF MERRILL
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS
AGENDA • THURSDAY JULY 22, 2021

Regular Meeting

City Hall Council Chambers

5:15 PM

To attend remotely, call 443-606-0771 and PIN 442 376 095 #.

- I. Call to Order
- II. Agenda Items:
 1. Establish a clear brand identity for the City of Merrill
Presentation by Scott Steele, Vice President, Chief Marketing Officer, Church Mutual Insurance Company
- III. Public Comment Period
- IV. Set time for next meeting
- V. Adjournment



Merrill, Wisconsin

Marketing, Branding & Communications Initiative



Definitions

MARKETING

Marketing creates an **overall concept and a vision** for the Merrill community to guide **promotional efforts** that will encourage tourism and attract and retain residents and businesses.



Definitions

BRAND | BRANDING

Brand is the image people have of the Merrill community. It's who people think we are, not who we think we are. It's the 'emotional aftertaste' that comes after an experience (even a second-hand one) with our community.

Branding is the process of creating a strong, positive image of the Merrill community— what people can expect from interacting with our community. **It is a promise.**



Definitions

COMMUNICATIONS

Communication in the Merrill community
should **create trust** in its citizens.

The goal is to **inspire citizens** to become involved in their
community and realize that their voices matter.



Overview

Merrill leadership is working to define a clear vision for their future, placing high value on community engagement, public service, economic development, education, diversity, equity and inclusion, collaboration and transparency.

By most accounts, Merrill has a good story to tell. Despite this, Merrill has struggled to consistently and clearly communicate its aspirations and achievements.

City officials have acknowledged the need to create and execute a Marketing plan that will contribute to building a positive future for Merrill that will have a direct impact on residents, businesses, visitors and other key stakeholders.

They have also acknowledged the need to more consistently and adequately inform residents and local businesses about issues, programs and initiatives that will have a direct impact on them or their neighborhoods and to regularly engage individuals in open and meaningful dialogue.

It is also important to align branding and marketing efforts with the Merrill Chamber of Commerce. By working together, we can present a unified, consistent and powerful message.



Overview

A Merrill Community Strategic Marketing Plan will address two primary challenges:

Market and brand Merrill:

- **What** are we trying to achieve?
- **Why** would someone visit Merrill?
- **Who** is Merrill best suited for?
- **How** does Merrill create value for people?
- **What** promise does Merrill make to attract people?

Engage and connect with the community:

- Enhance communications with the public.
- Develop a community engagement strategy.
- Ensure residents voices are heard.



Marketing Strategy



Create a marketing plan

Define Goals

Define Business
Objectives

Define Current
Situation

Define Target
Market

Develop
Communications
Strategy

Define Tactics

Establish
Measurements

Recommend
Next Steps



Define goals

What are we trying to achieve?

A broad primary outcome and stakeholders involved.

With resource (human and financial) restrictions, it is important that Merrill focus their marketing efforts to gain the most benefits. Unclear goals and unfocused resources can dilute our ability to effectively market Merrill.



Define goals

What is our we trying to achieve?

Grow Merrill or **maintain** Merrill?

This may seem like an obvious or simple answer, but provided research showed that there is a certain segment of the Merrill population that does not want to see change in the form of economic growth, use of land for residential and commercial expansion, diversity in population and more. To move forward, we must commit to a single objective.

Who will be involved? Key stakeholders – City Council, Chamber of Commerce, Concerned Citizens – others?



Define objectives

(assuming the answer is to grow Merrill)

*To meet this objective, what is the **single most important challenge** Merrill faces over the next five years?*

Three options to consider.



Define objectives

Option 1:

In a rapidly changing world, establish Merrill as a magnet for talent attraction and as an anchor for talent retention.

A focus on talent presents the following pros and cons:

Pros:

- Fresh perspectives.
- New tax income.
- Supports business growth.
- Increases younger population.
- Retains culture (retention).
- Adds vibrancy and diversity by expanding cultural and experience contributions.

Cons:

- Competing or not aligning with other area efforts (Wausau, Centergy, Stevens Point, etc.).
- Competing with nationwide effort to attract talent – some cities paying people to relocate (\$5K - \$15K, depending on circumstances).
- May not have the right types of jobs to attract talent willing to move (many jobs require on-site skills).
- May attract new residents but not in-town, location workers.
- May require infrastructure and business expansion and diversification.
- May require business model modifications to accommodate new expectations.

Define measurable results.



Define objectives

Option 2:

In a rapidly changing world, establish Merrill as a magnet for business attraction and as an anchor for business retention.

A focus on business presents the following pros and cons:

Pros:

- Fresh perspectives.
- New tax income.
- Supports business growth.
- Increases population (assuming a focus on businesses that hire workforce – not a warehouse or distribution center).
- Utilize unused, under-developed or non-developed commercial properties.
- Adds vibrancy and diversity by expanding cultural and experience contributions.

Cons:

- Competing or not aligning with other area efforts (Wausau, Centergy, Stevens Point, etc.).
- Competing with nationwide effort to attract businesses.
- May not have the right skillsets/education level to fill employment needs.
- May attract new residents but not in-town, location workers.
- May crowd an already limited housing market.
- May require significant investment in infrastructure.
- May require tax increases to address infrastructure needs.

Define measurable results.



Define objectives

Option 3:

In a rapidly changing world, establish Merrill as a destination for four-season tourism.

A focus on tourism presents the following pros and cons:

Pros:

- Enhances Merrill reputation and brand.
- New tax income.
- Supports business profitability and growth.
- Increases visibility of Merrill as a positive city to visit and possibly live.
- Leverages existing assets.
- Retains cultural and small town heritage.
- Adds vibrancy and diversity by expanding cultural and experience expectations.

Cons:

- Competing or not aligning with other area efforts to attract tourists.
- Visitor experience/first impression is not good (exit 208 does not emote a tourist or “fun” vibrancy).
- Requires significant promotional budget.
- Some citizens may not like the influx of tourists.
- May require significant investment in infrastructure.
- May require tax increases to address infrastructure needs.
- May require existing businesses to modify business model/hours.
- Many tourism jobs are seasonal and/or low-paying.

Define measurable results.



Current situation

Understand where we are, what's going on.

Our current state. Differentiation. Political and social environment. Competitive analysis. Our strengths. Our weaknesses. Our opportunities. Our threats. Risks and dependencies. Market research. Market trends. Best practices. Key stakeholders.

Consider the following Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (derived from multiple City Council materials). These are not exhaustive, but provide insights.



Current situation

Strengths:

- Government support for economic development (e.g. TIF, grants, etc.).
- Cost of living.
- Taxes.
- Land availability to build (residential/commercial).
- Safety.
- Education.
- Recreational spaces.
- Recreational and outdoor activities.
- Natural resources (e.g. lakes, rivers, parks, etc.).
- High quality city services.
- Established community.
- Small town atmosphere.
- Wisconsin and Prairie riverfronts.
- Proximity to Wausau.
- Proximity to highways
- Cultural heritage.

Opportunities

- Leverage remote working that allows workers to live in a different city than their company location.
- Leverage recreational spaces to increase amenities and activities.
- Build mid-level housing on available land.
- Increase civic engagement.
- Diversity business offerings and hours.
- Provide residents with privileges (e.g. free/reduced admission to events, preferred home lending, etc.).

Weaknesses

- Primarily labor and agricultural workforce needs and skillsets.
- Lack of mid-level and executive level professional positions and skillsets.
- Lack of mid-level housing.
- Lack of “urban” amenities and activities (e.g. restaurants, cafes, arts, music, etc.).
- Airline costs/limitations.
- Lack of proximity to large urban area.
- Lack of readily available high speed internet.
- Negative regional image.
- Limited retail shopping options.
- Declining and aging Merrill population.
- Low civic engagement.
- Lack of funds.
- Exodus of young people after graduation (High School and College).
- Spread out city – no truly defined “downtown”.
- Some businesses are not open in the evenings and have limited weekend, if any, hours.

Threats:

- Small towns throughout the United States are actively competing for workers.
- Small cities are providing financial incentives to workers to relocate (ranging from \$5K to \$15K).
- Wausau and surrounding cities competing for talent.
- Declining and aging Merrill population.
- Some citizens do not want, and will fight, change and growth.
- Unrealistic citizen expectations could hinder long-range efforts.
- Increase in taxes to fund efforts.
- Continued exodus of young people after graduation (High School and College).
- Increase in drug use.



Branding



Revisit

Revisit vision, mission and values.

Clarity and inspiration.



Our vision

Vision Statement: Definition

A short sentence that is an
expression of our future state of being.

A realistic, yet inspiring, vision of the future. Focus on the development of a scenario that raises the competitiveness of Merrill in a sustainable way.



Our mission

Mission Statement: Definition

The **path we will follow** to achieve our vision.

A declaration of our core purpose and focus. It includes specific ideas with regard to:

Competitive advantages and self-concept (assets, competencies, sense of place)

Market focus (e.g. among tourists, businesses, citizens, commuters)

Local benefits (e.g. development; revitalization; environmental, cultural and social values)



Values

Values: Definition

The **fundamental beliefs** upon which our organization and its behavior are based.



Brand attributes

Brand Attributes: Definition

Touchstones that **define the qualities** of our brand.

Characteristics that make our brand **personal and unique** in the mind of our target audiences. They help us **stand apart** from our competition and are beneficial in establishing the **tone-of-voice** in communications.



Brand promise

Brand Promise: Definition

Set an **expectation of an experience** with our brand.

It needs to be **relevant, competitive and authentic**. But it can't be everything to everybody. If it is, it will not be differentiating or meaningful.



Brand personality

Brand Personality: Definition

A set of **human characteristics** that bring our brand to life.

A brand personality is something to which our **audiences can relate**; an effective brand increases its brand equity by having a **consistent set of traits** that a specific audience segment enjoys.



Brand value proposition

Brand Value Proposition: Definition

Explains the **what, who, how and why**.

Explains **what** benefit we provide for **whom** and **how** we do it uniquely well.
It describes our target audience, what we stand for, and **why** we're distinctly better than the alternatives.



Brand story

Brand Story: Definition

A cohesive **narrative** that encompasses the facts and feelings that are created by our brand.

Unlike traditional advertising, which is about showing and telling about our brand, a story must inspire an emotional reaction.



Tagline

Tagline: Definition

It tells people **who we are** and **what we stand for** in a few succinct words.

It is not a mission or vision statement. It is a marketing message.

The purpose of a tagline is to create a positive, memorable phrase that sticks in our head and helps them identify our brand and our marketing message.

Taglines change as organization messages change.



Brand identity

Brand Identity: Definition

The **visible elements** of our brand.

Includes items such as **color, design, and logo**, that identify and distinguish the brand.



Communications



Communications

Objectives

An official city-wide communications plan is needed to maximize communication effectiveness. Consider the following five broad objectives designed to meet Merrill's intent in creating a communication strategy.

1. *Increase Awareness:* Information about Merrill policies and programs should be available to all of our audiences and for priority projects to be common knowledge among our key audiences.
2. *Increase Engagement:* Encourage and enable residents, businesses and partners to participate in public policy formation. In addition, generate high levels of participation in, and attendance at, Merrill programs and events.
3. *Provide Access:* Reduce barriers to communication in order to reach the broadest possible audience.
4. *Enhance Transparency:* Conduct Merrill business and decision-making in the open, making information about policies and operations available to all.
5. *Reinforce Credibility:* Provide honest and responsive communications that will help Merrill build trust and credibility with our residents, businesses and partners.



Communications

Four Pillars

1. *Clear and Direct:* Strive to use the direct and straightforward language to communicate Merrill's policies and programs to ensure that all communications are understandable and accessible to the widest possible audience.
2. *Proactive:* Whenever possible, provide information on emerging issues, and follow up to ensure the most accurate and complete information is available to the public as soon as is possible.
3. *Transparent:* Be open in communicating what is happening and make information about the policies, finances, and operations of Merrill available to all citizens.
4. *Listening and Learning:* Communication flows two-ways, both providing information and receiving feedback. Listening to residents, businesses and partners builds better trust and credibility so the policies and programs reflect the needs and wishes of the community.



Next Steps

Next Steps

- **Market and brand Merrill:**
 - Decision on focus
 - Create strategic plans
- **Communications:**
 - Decision on goals and pillars
 - Create communications plan