



CITY OF MERRILL
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS
AGENDA • THURSDAY JANUARY 20, 2022

Regular Meeting

City Hall Council Chambers

5:15 PM

To attend remotely, call 385-645-7755 and PIN 664 964 854#

- I. Call to Order
- II. Minutes of Previous Meeting(s):
 1. Minutes of December 16, 2021 meeting
- III. Agenda Items:
 1. Job Description Communications Specialist
 2. Merrill Marketing BRAND
- IV. Discuss Marketing & Communications in light of recent City Hall events
- V. Public Comment Period
- VI. Next meeting date, time and location
- VII. Adjournment



CITY OF MERRILL
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS
MINUTES • THURSDAY DECEMBER 16, 2021

Regular Meeting**City Hall Council Chambers****5:15 PM****I. Call to Order**

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Rick Blake	Chair	Present	
John M. Van Lieshout	Aldersperson - Fifth District	Excused	
Mark Weix	Aldersperson - Seventh District	Present	

Others attending (either remotely or in-person) included: Library Director Jessica Zellers, City Administrator Dave Johnson, City Attorney Tom Hayden, Gene Bebel, Mike Ravn, John Greenwood, Scott Steele, Clyde Nelson (arr. 5:18) and City Clerk Bill Heideman. Merrill Productions was present to videotape the meeting.

II. Minutes of Previous Meetings:**1. Minutes of November 18, 2021 meeting**

Motion (Weix/Blake) to approve.

RESULT: APPROVED

III. Agenda Items:**1. Discuss talking points for public information**

Information was in the meeting packet.

Scott Steele led discussion on four talking points. The four talking points are:

1. We're investing in building a positive future for Merrill.
2. We're focusing a branding and marketing effort on attracting and retaining talent.
3. We believe the Merrill community is truly unique and special.
4. This is a community effort - everyone's voice and participation are welcome and important.

These talking points were recently presented as part of a radio interview. That interview seemed to generate positive feedback from the community.

2. Consider hiring/contracting procedure for Communications Specialist

City Administrator Johnson distributed information comparing a "Communications Specialist" position and a "Marketing Specialist" position.

It was noted that the Communications Specialist will be an outside and contracted position. The person in that position will not be a City employee.

Recruiting for this position will begin at the local level. If a suitable local candidate does not emerge, the search will be expanded.

Gene Bebel stated that he was not in favor of a “virtual” option for this position.

Because the City will be paying for this position, Scott Steele wants to make sure that he follows all the correct procedures throughout the recruiting and hiring process. He will meet with City Administrator Johnson to discuss the details.

IV. Public Comment Period

None.

V. Establish date, time & location of next meeting

Thursday, January 20th, 2022 at 5:15 P.M. in the City Hall Common Council Chambers.

VI. Adjournment

Motion (Weix/Blake) to adjourn. Carried. Adjourned at 6:07 P.M.



CITY OF MERRILL
City Administrator

David Johnson, City Administrator

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Merrill, Wisconsin 54452
Phone (715) 536-5594
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JOB DESCRIPTION

JOB TITLE: Consultant - Communications Specialist

STATUS: Non-exempt

REPORTS TO: City Administrator

DATE: January 7, 2022

DRAFT

Position Summary:

Responsible for communications that consistently and adequately inform Merrill community 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. Work is performed in accordance with department policies and procedures and with related state legislation. Exercises considerable independent judgment and receives general supervision from the City Administrator and Marketing Committee. Involves considerable contact with City and County Departments, local businesses and the general public. This position is a work-for-hire consultant position.

Principal Duties and Responsibilities:

- Provide a central point of contract for City internal and external communications efforts.
- Intentionally and clearly communicate policies, programs and processes to the community.
- Create a process for gaining community feedback and ensuring their voices are heard and considered.
- Ensures consistent processes are followed.
- Supports the Merrill community in developing, reviewing, editing and translating of communication materials, including public relations/media relations coordination and engagement.
- Works with the Marketing Committee and City Departments to identify projects, stories and messages that are engaging, motivating and high quality, and which communicate impact and showcase the efforts of the Merrill community government, business community and residential community.
- Establishes and maintains positive relationships with media contacts.
- Monitors media coverage of the Merrill community, and coordinates interviews for appropriate City spokespeople.

- Vets major issue and incident communications with assigned City personnel prior to public announcement.
- Contributes to identifying new and creative ways to enhance the visibility and outreach of the efforts of the Marketing Committee and City Departments.
- Supports the Marketing Committee and City Departments with the creation and/or delivery of communications activities and products such as written content, newsletters, social posts and events, related to the work of the Merrill community.
- Navigates the dissemination of communications in an accurate and timely manner through multiple channels (website, social, PR, meetings, etc.).
- Ensures that all communication materials synergize with the Marketing Committee communications strategies and branding.
- Ensures all communication material is targeted at agreed audiences and delivers agreed key messages.
- Documents learnings and build a 'library' of communication materials.

Additional Duties and Responsibilities:

Other duties as may be necessary to fulfill the responsibilities of this position.

Work Relationships and Scope:

Reports to: City Administrator.

Supervises: None.

Work Relationships: Works very closely with the Marketing Committee, City departments, the public and vendors.

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities, Qualifications Required:

Education/Experience: Bachelor's degree and five years responsible related experience.

Skills/Abilities:

- Experience in public relations, media relations and social media.
- AP Style writing and editing skills.
- Ability to manage projects.
- Knowledge of computer systems and applications.
- Ability to interpret and communicate laws and ordinances.
- Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing.
- Ability to establish and maintain an effective working relationship with City and County Departments, State Agencies and the General Public.
- Possess good judgment, thoroughness and dependability.
- Website content a plus.

Working Conditions:

Job Conditions/Work Location: Work will be performed remotely. Work hours are normally during regular business hours and average 30 hours weekly. May be required to travel within Lincoln County.

Physical Requirements: None.

Consultant Acknowledgment:

This job description describes the general nature and level of work performed. It does not state or imply that these are the only duties and responsibilities assigned to the job. The individual may be required to perform other job-related duties as requested by the supervisor. All requirements are subject to change over time, and to possible modification to reasonably accommodate individuals with a disability.

Consultant's Signature

Date



Merrill, Wisconsin

Marketing, Branding & Communications Initiative

Update 10.06.21



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 and branding 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.



Vision

Merrill will be recognized as a welcoming city with a safe and diverse community, vibrant and sustainable economy, and a comfortable quality of life for all.



Mission

To enrich quality of life through innovative, consistent and efficient City services and strong partnerships with citizens, businesses and key stakeholders.



Values

Partnership: Work together to get things done in a collaborative and respectful manner.

Integrity: Act with transparency and be accountable for what we do and say.

Service: Provide professional, respectful service to those who live, work or visit.

Sustainability: Make decisions with an understanding of their impact on the environment, people, community and finances.

Diversity and Inclusion: Embrace the traits and characteristics that make people unique and provide a sense of belonging and support within our community.



Marketing Strategy



What are we trying to achieve?

We will move Merrill forward in building a robust economy.

Achieving this goal will require the collaboration, commitment and hard work of City officials, citizens, Chamber of Commerce, businesses and key stakeholders.



Define objectives

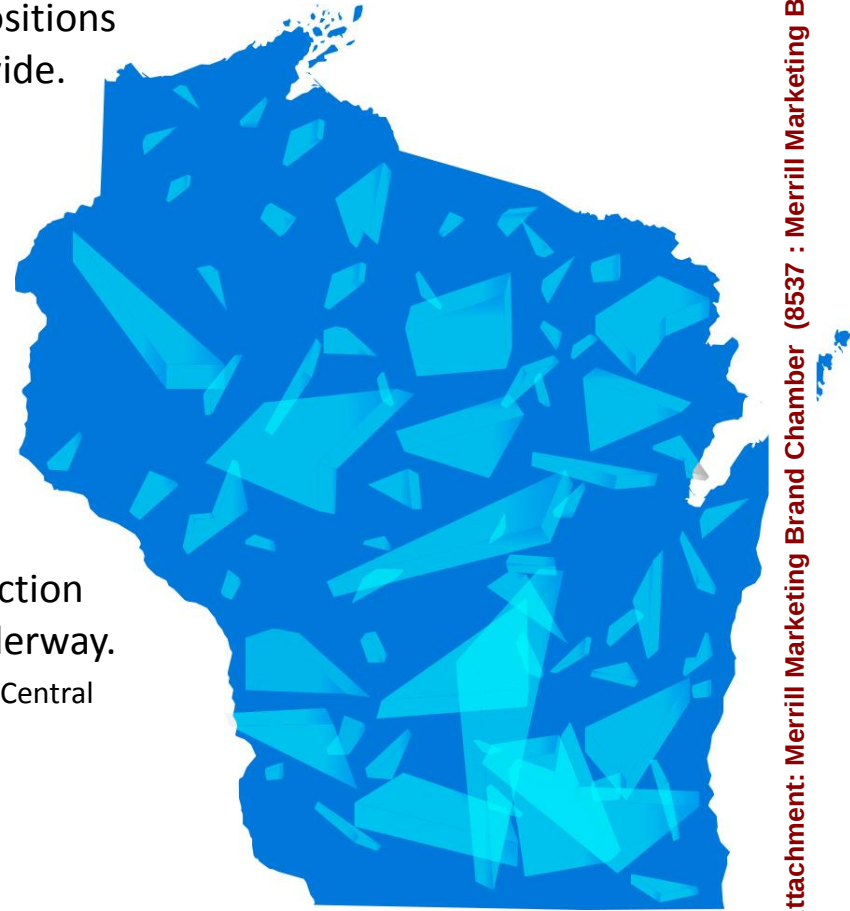
In a rapidly changing world, we will establish Merrill as a magnet for talent attraction and as an anchor for talent retention to achieve:

- Influx of qualified candidates applying to targeted industries and positions in Merrill.
- High percentage retention of existing workforce in Merrill.
- Effective and collaborative local, regional and statewide business and education partnerships.
- Consistent messaging.
- Efficient use of resources.
- Strong Merrill economy.



Current situation

- Deep shortage of a skilled workforce to fill open positions not only in Merrill and Wisconsin, but also nationwide.
- A growing skilled-workforce shortage that is expected to worsen over the next decade.
- In Central Wisconsin:
 - The need for highly skilled workers is increasing, especially in the areas of technology, medical, manufacturing and finance/insurance.
 - The need for middle skilled workers is increasing, especially in the areas of construction, healthcare and labor.
- Wisconsin has multiple, uncoordinated talent attraction and retention efforts by multiple organizations underway.
 - This fragmented effort results in competition within our own Central Wisconsin region – even our own state – for talent.



Attachment: Merrill Marketing Brand Chamber (8537 : Merrill Marketing BRAND)



Current situation – occupations

Employment Needs for Merrill, Wisconsin:

Educational Services

- Teachers (Pre-K to College)
- Special Education
- Specialty Areas (Counselors, Social Workers, etc.)
- Administration
- Coaches
- Childcare

Construction & Trade

- Plumber
- Electrician
- General Contractor
- Mason
- CNC Operators
- Mechanics
- IT
- Welders
- Fabricators
- Design/Engineers
- Project Management

Finance & Insurance

- CPA
- Actuaries
- Accountants
- Underwriters
- Administration
- Claim
- IT (Java developers, cyber security, etc.)

Healthcare & Social Assistance

- Nurses
- CNA
- Doctors
- Physician Assistants
- Nurse Practitioner
- Therapy- Physical and Mental
- Administration
- Clerical
- IT



Current situation – benefits

Why would someone want to move to Merrill?

Merrill offers extraordinary life/work integration with terrific career options, quality of life, outdoor recreation and friendly community.

Career/Job Opportunity:

- Variety of career options and skill level opportunities in multiple career fields.
- Good pay and benefits.

Lifestyle:

- Small town atmosphere.
- Community, volunteerism, neighborhoods are all part of the values and culture.
- Cost of living.
- Short commute to work.
- Land availability to build (residential/commercial).
- Safety.

Education:

- Multiple higher education institutions in the area.
- Work to career programs.
- School to business collaboration.
- Scholarship opportunities.
- Historic public library.
- Athletic facilities.

Natural Environment:

- Four-season recreational and outdoor spaces and activities.
- Natural resources (e.g. lakes, rivers, parks, etc.).
- Wisconsin and Prairie riverfronts.
- River Bend Trail system
- Nature and wildlife.

Community Structure:

- High quality city services.
- Established community.
- Proximity to Wausau.
- Proximity to highways.
- Small-plane municipal airport with jet A fuel pump

Cultural and heritage:

- Historic sites.
- Traditions.



Target audience – persona

- People, ages 25-45 – Mid-level professional and mid-level laborer, early to mid-career.
- Recent high school and college graduates.
- Places a high premium on professional and personal growth and development and a desire for “purposeful work”.
- Places a high premium on social:
 - Socially active – network with peers, friends and family.
 - Socially conscious – environment, local connections, natural vs processed.
 - Community focused – be part of something.
- Places a high premium on lifestyle:
 - Prefers to live in a natural area close to an urban-type center.
 - Not interested in big city living – more inclined to small city living.

Next step: Overlay persona with “benefits” and “occupations” to narrow the focus for marketing efforts.



Communications



Communications

Objectives

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

1. *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. *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. *Access:* Reduce barriers to communication in order to reach the broadest possible audience.
4. *Transparency:* Conduct Merrill business and decision-making in the open, making information about policies and operations available to all.
5. *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.



Social Media

Social media will be integral in helping to tell Merrill's story and connect with new audiences and engage its current audience. The city will focus on four "buckets" to help guide content development:

1. Education: Keep people informed on what is happening – City Hall meetings, updates on projects, initiatives, etc.
2. Business: Focus on recruitment, local business updates, business/people features.
3. Entertainment: Share events, activities, etc.
4. Showcase: Feature unique stories/people/culture/etc. that highlight Merrill as a great place to live and work.

Facebook and Instagram: The City of Merrill can use posts, video, targeted advertising, and Groups to connect to a wide audience. It should become a trusted central source for community information. Note: Video dominates social media and tends to receive more exposure and engagement than posts.

LinkedIn: Actively use this platform to connect with professionals and job seekers. The City of Merrill can share some of the same content shared on Facebook, with a focus on sharing content for a professional audience.

- Merrill should prioritize creating a LinkedIn page.
After the LinkedIn page is created, City of Merrill employees should update their LinkedIn profile so they are following the City of Merrill page.
- Employees will also be encouraged to share content using their own personal profiles to help spread awareness about the new LinkedIn page and to encourage others to follow.

Social Media Advertising: Social media ads are some of the most cost-effective ads for a business. The City of Merrill can use targeting to reach our target audiences. Social Media Growth Goals

- The City of Merrill has an established presence on Facebook, with over 1,900 followers and over 1,700 likes. Facebook goals will include increasing the number of followers and increasing the level of engagement of posts.
- The City of Merrill does not currently have a presence on LinkedIn. LinkedIn goals will include establishing a LinkedIn page and a focus on growing the page.



Personnel

Personnel recommendations:

Hire a director of communications.

- Provides a central point of contact for internal and external communications efforts.
- Ensures consistent processes are followed.
- The role will require the following:
 - Vet major issue and incident communications with assigned City personnel prior to public announcement.
 - Develop or manage creation of communications, including messaging, writing and distribution.
 - PR coordination and engagement.
 - Ability to navigate the dissemination of communications in an accurate and timely manner.
 - Contribute to the development of communication guidelines, including, but not limited to, tone, readability, clarity and style.
 - The Marketing Committee can assist in development of the guidelines.
 - Intentionally and clearly communicate policies, programs and processes to the community.
 - Create a process for gaining community feedback and ensuring their voices are heard and considered.

• Social Media Content Manager

- Leverage technologies to proactively and effectively communicate about City activities.
 - Create and maintain City Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn page; participate in the existing Merrill-Lincoln County Community Group; continue to leverage the City website (ci.Merrill.wi.us)



Branding



Communications

Brand Development

The Marketing Committee will work with the City, Chamber of Commerce and community to help define our brand. The brand, at a high level, may include the following elements:

- *Brand attributes:* Touchstones that define the qualities of our brand and make our brand personal and unique in the mind of our target audiences.
- *Brand Promise:* Set an expectation of an experience with our brand that are relevant, competitive and authentic.
- *Brand Personality:* A set of human characteristics that bring our brand to life.
- *Brand Value Proposition:* Explains the what, who, how and why. Explains what benefit we provide for whom and how we do it uniquely well and why we're distinctly better than the alternatives.
- *Brand Story:* A cohesive narrative that encompasses the facts and feelings that are created by our brand.
- *Tagline:* 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.
- *Brand Identity:* The visible elements of our brand. Includes items such as color, design, and logo, that identify and distinguish the brand.

The branding effort will require hiring a designer to help create the brand identity elements.



Timeline



Communications

Timeline (Draft only)

The timeline for the marketing and branding will be need to be somewhat fluid, considering that the committee is made up of volunteers. But, with a commitment to completion, we anticipate the following could be achieved.

Marketing

- Stage One (October 2021): Publicly share the marketing and branding effort and the updated vision, mission and values statements.
- Stage Two November 2021): Present full plan recommendations.
- Stage Three (January 2022 – taking holidays into consideration): City and community provide input.
- Stage Four (February 2022): 1) Finalize and approve the plan; 2) Begin implementation of the communications plan.
- Stage Five: Coordinate marketing efforts with branding efforts: Anticipate launch end of Q2 2022.

Branding

- Stage One (January 2022): Marketing Committee present brand recommendations (attributes, promise, personality, value proposition).
- Stage Two (February 2022): City and community provide input.
- Stage Three (March 2022): Finalize brand recommendations.
- Stage Four (May 2022): Marketing Committee present brand recommendations (story, tagline, identity)
- Stage Five (June 2022): City and community provide input on recommendations.
- Stage Six (July 2022): Finalize brand recommendations
- Stage Seven (August 2022): Launch marketing and brand campaigns.