

Focus Macomb: A Partnership for Economic Development
Summary – July 26, 2007 Quality of Life Committee Meeting-Citizens State Bank

Members Present:

Ameldia Brown, HF Health System
I. J. Campbell, City of Roseville
Tony Comito
Susan Doherty, Macomb County Commissioner
Arthur Mullen, Mt. Clemens DDA
Chris Pozios, Pozios Properties, LLC
Mounir Sharobeem, Judson Center
Paul Socia, Citizens State Bank

Members Missed:

Joe Abdoo, IBEW
Michele Barnard, Beaumont Hospital
Suzanne Coats, Turning Point, Inc.
Ken DeCock, Boykin's Farm Market
Larry Garrisi, Sunshine Homes
Jay Goscinski, Remax Acclaim
Patrick Green, Aon Risk Services of Michigan
Frank Marella, CARE House
Karen Parenteau, Health Alliance Plan
Roy Rose, AEW, Inc.

Staff: Mike Rozny, Maria Zardis

Guests: Justin Robinson, MCDPED

Introduction: Mike Rozny led off with a quick overview of accomplishments to date, and an overview of the agenda for the day. Justin Robinson then took the floor and presented ideas based on 19 questions developed at the July 12 meeting. His remarks, with added discussion that occurred at the meeting, follow:

Q of L Website Response

- 1. What costs are associated with developing/enhancing an existing website? Is there someone within the county that can assist us in developing this site or do we need an outside consultant? If we need to “hire” someone to develop the appearance of the website, is it possible to enlist local educational programs for help (Could we sponsor a website design contest in collaboration with Macomb Community College and others?)**

A minimum of several thousand dollars and probably at least 200 hours of additional staff time for content development, if you want to create a very relevant, well designed site that users will use and enjoy. *One of the easiest ways to develop the website is to branch off of the Macomb Business website. The cost would be somewhere around \$10,000 - \$15,000 if we want to completely design a website from a blank slate. This would take considerable effort (by the Committee, the County, and the Consultant).*

The county has staff that may be able to assist. Justin Robinson may be able to aid in the in the development of the information architecture – overall concept, navigation system, type of content and user functionality. The county's IT Department may be able to provide some limited design time. A consultant should be a part of the technical design process to ensure best results – largely in terms of technical design, interactive user features and graphics assistance. A major benefit of utilizing a paid consultant is the dedicated resources that will aid in completing the project in a timely manner. *It will be necessary to use a consultant at some point during the development period, and we should think through how we could most effectively combine our resources with those of the consultant, in order to leverage them.*

It is important that the design is done properly the first time, in order to avoid losing user interest. An improperly designed website could irreparably harm the overall effort. There can be no shortcuts in this process if we want to do it right.

- 2. How do we determine what content to include on our website?**

There are numerous methods to do this but I recommend 1) Always think of content from the users perspective – what would you want to find? Understand that there are different types of people that have different perspective and you cannot appeal to everyone, but you can and should develop

content that appeals to users that would most likely utilize such a site. 2) What assets do we want to inform people about and how do we share information about those resources that will entice users to visit. 3) Look at other successful websites for reference. I would caution that if you look to this approach you must really look at many website examples and analyze what works and why. Do not look to one single example for ideas.

3. Who can develop the appearance and functionality of the website?

MCPED staff may be able to assist with the appearance and functionality. The Macomb Business site may be able to serve as the model (*and as a template to save time and money*). *Justin recommended that the Committee use the technical design of the Macomb Business site, but that it ultimately should be new, and stand alone.*

4. Who can develop the content of the website?

The development of the content is probably the most important part of any site. *Content is why the user frequent the site*. If the content does not speak to users then no one will use the site. In order to generate good content the people writing it should be knowledgeable about the subject and understand what the user might be interested in and why. Things like pictures and descriptions that explain what users will experience when they visit is important. With that said, the members of this committee can begin the development of the content. *A question is raised as to how the Committee could ensure actual user input, since the Committee itself is not entirely representative of potential Macomb County users*. You can start with the basic elements you will want for any asset and then begin to fill in the blanks. *One design element that might be useful is to have specific buttons designed to pique the user's curiosity and interest*. At a later date someone will need to review and rework the content to ensure it all has the same voice and is consistent.

5. How do we keep it relevant? What kind of time will it take to keep it updated?

The best way to keep it relevant is to design the site properly from the beginning – navigation, content and usability. *A good way to ensure relevance is for Committee members to place themselves in the user's mindset, asking, "What would I need or use?" Once the preliminary design was created, the Committee might conduct a Beta Test to more fully ensure relevance*. Time to keep it updated will vary depending on the design and each page should always be designed from the perspective of what will it take to keep it updated. The best approach is to design a few pages that should be updated fairly frequently – weekly and monthly and others that almost never need updating. The pages user see most should be updated most – especially the homepage, a calendar of events, etc. *During the design phase, it will be important to determine how much effort (and cost) needs to be devoted to updating and other maintenance items, and to factor that into both the design and into obtaining sufficient resources to keep the product relevant.*

6. We envision a concentric circle of users; Macomb County residents, residents of SE Michigan, residents of Michigan, national and international users. Is it possible to be all things to each of these targeted groups in one place? How do we let visitors/potential visitors to SE Michigan know about our site? (Can we work with a company that creates visitor magazines to advertise for free?)

Design the site for your core users. In this case that should probably be county residents of which there are over 830,000. *Many of these potential users do not know how to target their efforts to achieve their objectives; proper design could help them*. These will be the people that will use it most often and therefore that is how the site can generate the greatest impact. *Do not expect as much use from non-residents*. If the site is designed from this perspective most else will fall in place and any

user will be able to use the site. To let potential visitors know about the site I would recommend linking to some other key websites – county, etc.

7. How do we attract visitors to our site? Is it going to cost anything to market the site?

If you want to get the word out in mass and quickly then marketing is essential and good marketing requires a budget. Other less expensive or free options would be to link to other relevant sites, e.g. *Mich.org or travel Michigan, and County and regional sites*, send out press releases, get local businesses and partners to cross promote. Most importantly, a well designed site that speaks to users will be found by people on the internet, especially with proper search optimization. My goal would be to design something so useful and unique that it gets talked about because of its utility to users. *We should also add links to coming events. This is something that could occur fairly quickly. (County staff may be available to help with this.) The Committee could also take advantage of promotional materials including press releases, and links to business and other establishments.*

8. Can we track visitors?

A simple count of visitors to the site can be tracked very easily. More specific information about how the site is used can also be tracked, but depending on how you plan to use and interpret that information will add additional cost and staff time. Such monitoring of user information is one of the best ways to manage and adapt the site so that it stays relevant.

9. Can we create revenue from advertising/sponsorship of the site that would help with ongoing maintenance? What are the legal implications of advertising on a site that could conceivably be perceived as one supported by taxpayers?

If the site is associated with the county, which I'd probably recommend then out IT Department has some strict policies that we would need to explore further. Personally I would deter much advertising because it can diminish the users experience.

The Committee could charge a linkage fee that would be affordable to any entity wishing to establish a link, perhaps \$50.00. There could be a fee for a "featured entity of the month", perhaps \$250.00 per featured entity. Finally, for a greater sum, perhaps \$5,000 per year, approximately 8 – 10 entities could be prominently featured. Fees could escalate once the site has proven its value to the subscriber. The revenues derived would be used to pay the cost of development and maintenance.

10. Can we make the case that advertising on our space would be beneficial for sponsors? How much could we charge? How do we determine how and where advertising/links to advertisers would be placed within the site?

Additional advertising can require more maintenance that may or may not offset the additional hassle and cost.

Advertising could pay for maintenance and periodic updating. It was suggested that a non-profit organization be created to manage this responsibility.

11. Is it necessary to establish policies for which types of entities we will permit advertising space? For instance, if Right to Life of Michigan were to express an interest, how would we deal with it?

Would be a good idea if advertising were permitted. *The process used would have to be, to say the least, very robust.*

12. What is the process for categorizing the types of things we want to include in this website. (How do we create the “bones” or site map?)

MCPED staff may be available to assist. The organization of the site should be logical and be easy for users to understand what is where. The Macomb Business site can again provide a format on which the organization could be based. Begin by listing all the content you want on the site. Then identify what which content is considered most important. Next begin to group related content. It will be very likely that content will make sense in more than one place, that is acceptable. This exercise will help the group begin to understand how pages and content could be grouped. It will take some time to determine what makes the most sense.

The idea would be to start large and prioritize the categories by user interest.

13. Do we need policies for what is appropriate content for the site?

For content on things like events, private business listings, etc. it may be a good idea to have some policies/guidelines to assess what is appropriate for the site. *See #11 above.*

14. If we want to include information about public events, how do we decide what to include and exclude. Legally, how must we establish these guidelines (for a publicly supported site) to avoid issues of “favoritism?”

Again, I would recommend some policies/guidelines. The legal questions I cannot answer. *Questions have been submitted to the County’s Corporation Counsel for consideration.*

15. How do we determine if the site is a success? Are there benchmarks we should hit for the number of users? Can we isolate return users from new users?

One method is to track the number of users that use the site. I would not worry about benchmarks too much because the site will take time to build users. Users could be deterred if you force people to sign in every time they come to the site, or at the minimum ask people to register once for e-mail updates or something of that nature.

This will, obviously, require continual follow-up.

16. If we want our site to be the “go to” for people looking for things to do, how do we measure our success? Can the site be interactive in any way? Can we survey users? Can we provide a way for users to post events/places to go/things to do?

Again tracking users is the easiest method. Others include user feedback but most importantly talking to those “things to do” and seeing if they have had increased patronage. The site can be interactive but to what level is what needs to be determined. Surveys are easy; direct posting of information may raise issues with monitoring people’s postings for appropriate content.

Tracking could be troublesome. The first question to be addressed is “to what purpose would tracking be used?” The Committee should track only for a valid and clearly understood purpose.

Perhaps the simplest way would be to develop a simple survey to be completed by the end (business or organization) entity, to determine if the website has caused an increase in their business. One way to ensure that users frequent sponsoring businesses and other entities would be to provide coupons

on the site, for redemption at the business. (This could be a benefit of purchasing a weekly or monthly “featured business” link.)

17. How do we link our site with other informative sources so that our information is picked up elsewhere? In other words, if we promote the Peach Festival, how can we make sure that it is featured on other sites that promote events/activities/place to go?

Some sites will be easy to link to and will allow us to do it for free. Ideally anyone we promote we should also ask them to promote us, but following up on that and monitoring who has complied will take valuable staff time. Having cross-promotional language built into a policy for being listed may be the easiest method to get linked.

18. If we were to enhance the existing “Quality of Life” pages within www.MacombBusiness.com how could we also link to www.macombcountymi.gov? Should there be another address out there so that folks could enter these pages directly (for example, could we create an address like www.MacombLife.com)

I would recommend a separate address that would bring people directly to the Quality of Life site.

19. What are SROs? How do we build our website so that it tops the list of search engine results?

Search optimization is the science of getting sites to rank high in search engines. The best way to make this happen is to design the site properly and have content that will relate to what users are searching for on the web. There are some other tips that you want to make sure are built in when designing the site.

The Committee should take the time to 1) identify the user and 2) get the design right, as its highest priorities. Successfully doing this will ensure top billing on the web browser.

Prepared by Justin Robinson 7-25-07; Amended with 7/26 Meeting Discussion

Next Steps:

1. Define the Vision and Mission for the website. Mike Rozny is to draft the vision and mission statements, and forward to the Committee for consideration at the next meeting. This was developed and is attached.
2. Identify the audience and user.
3. Design the content.
4. Design the Site
5. Develop the structure to operate and maintain the site. (This would involve identifying an entity to serve this purpose – non-profit specifically tasked with this function, or some other entity.)
6. Develop a marketing plan to reach the intended users.

The Committee decided that the first three steps could be accomplished at the next meeting, to be held at the same location, at 4:00 on Thursday, August 9. The meeting adjourned.