

DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION &
ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE FOR
MISSOURI

MARKETING PLAN

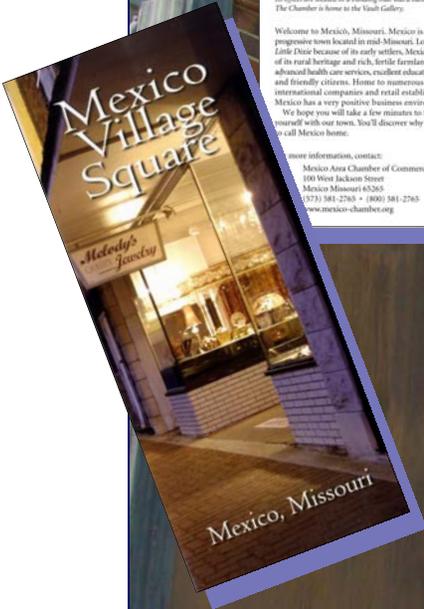
MAY 2011




The Mexico Area Chamber of Commerce was established in 1898. Its offices are located in a building that was a bank built in 1933. The Chamber is home to the Vault Gallery.

Welcome to Mexico, Missouri. Mexico is a small, yet progressive town located in east Missouri. Long known as Little Dixie because of its early settlers, Mexico is proud of its rural heritage and rich, fertile farmland. We have advanced health care services, excellent educational facilities, and friendly citizens. Home to numerous national and international companies and retail establishments, Mexico has a very positive business environment. We hope you will take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with our town. You'll discover why we are proud to call Mexico home.

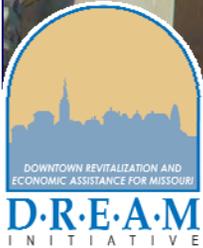
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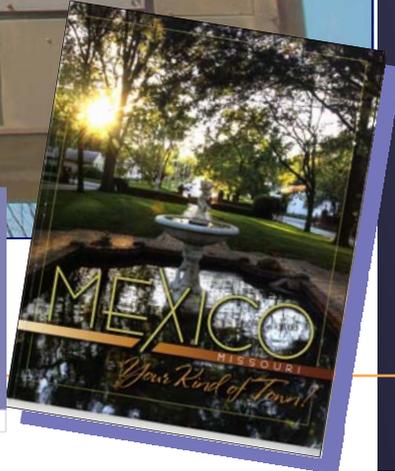
Mexico Village Square

Melody's Jewelry

Mexico, Missouri




Mainstreet of the Midwest
MEXICO
MISSOURI



MEXICO
MISSOURI
Your Kind of Town!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....1

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS.....2

 Organizational Structure.....4

 Traditional Media and Promotions.....4

 Online Assets and Search.....5

 Social Media6

 Moving Forward.....7

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES.....8

 Objective 1: Engage Mexico Residents in the Future of Village
 Square9

 Objective 2: Strengthen the Mexico Brand.....12

 Objective 3: Improve Mexico’s Reputation in the Region and State.....18

 Objective 4: Increase Business Investment and Retail Sales
 in the Village Square.....20

 Objective 5: Establish Mexico as a Tourist Destination.....23

CONCLUSION.....31

APPENDIX.....33

 SWOT Analysis.....35

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mexico is not the average rural Missouri town. The county seat of Audrain County, it has more than 11,000 residents and houses the Missouri Military Academy, Miss Missouri Pageant and the American Saddlebred Horse Museum. The city also boasts a diverse economy ranging from agriculture to manufacturing, healthcare and retail.

Downtown Mexico, also referred to as the “Village Square,” has numerous assets including outstanding business owners offering great products and quality service. Many business people and civic leaders work in the Village Square everyday, giving the area a concentration of talented professionals. It is these people which give the area such potential for growth. Downtown should utilize these existing assets of business savvy, entrepreneurship and civic leadership to develop and sustain a reputation for quality. The goal of the marketing plan is to improve the sense of identity and level of participation within the Village Square, both locally and regionally. An identity which builds upon the assets of the business owners, civic institutions, events and history. An identity of a place of quality: quality people, quality service, quality experience.

While Mexico has a lot to offer residents, visitors and businesses, the Village Square has some empty storefronts and gaps in organization. The city sees tourists, but many stay only briefly, and the community’s identity is largely unknown to those who live outside of the area. The Village Square Association (VSA), in association with the city and chamber, is working hard to revitalize Downtown, but as a volunteer-driven effort without funds or a

formal structure, the task has been difficult. To create sustainable and long-lasting impacts for the community, Mexico’s marketing and communications efforts should focus on supporting five primary objectives, listed as follows:

Objective 1: Engage Mexico Residents in the Future of Village Square

With a paid executive director and by engaging more residents as members, the Village Square Association can increase its impact exponentially.

Objective 2: Strengthen the Mexico Brand

Clearing up confusion around competing taglines and defining the city’s heart and soul can help the community differentiate itself and become more competitive in the region.

Objective 3: Improve Mexico’s Reputation in the Region and State

By establishing a thought leadership position in key industries and taking part in regional coalitions, Mexico can improve its position and draw additional investment.

Objective 4: Increase Business Investment and Retail Sales in the Village Square

The Village Square has quality available storefronts and interesting niche markets that could be attractive for small business owners.

Objective 5: Establish Mexico as a Tourist Destination

With little additional investment of capital or labor, Mexico tourism could expand greatly to reach entirely new audiences.

Mexico, Missouri

Several strategies and tactics are outlined throughout this report to help the City of Mexico move the needle in these five critical areas. Many can be enacted immediately at little to no cost. However, others may require additional research, time and financial investment on the part of the City or the VSA.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

With more than 11,000 residents, the City of Mexico is a hub for several communities in mid-Missouri including Vandalia, Laddonia, Martinsburg, Auxvasse, Wellsville and Centralia. It is also near several larger communities including Moberly, Fulton and Columbia.

The Village Square is the civic and cultural center of the community. Downtown is the location of many institutions which exemplify this: the county courthouse, city hall, police station, library, and the chamber of commerce. These entities give character to Downtown and bring citizens to the area. The institutions and a mix of retail shops, restaurants and offices comprise the Village Square.

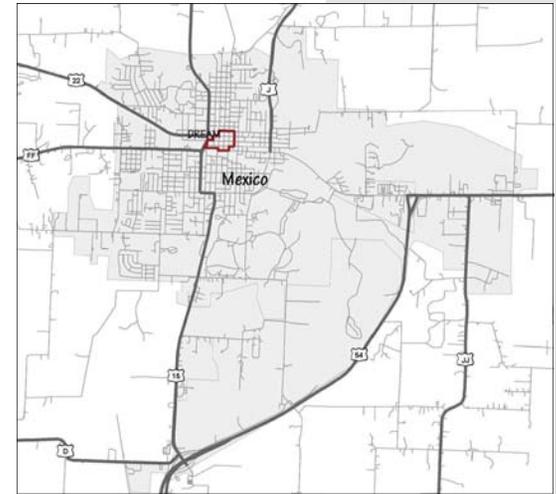
The Downtown Mexico Study Area for the DREAM Initiative is comprised of 11 city blocks and 86 parcels covering nearly 27 acres. Downtown Mexico is primarily accessed via Business Route 54, which connects to State Highway 54 approximately 3

miles south and 2 miles east of Downtown. From the south, Clark Street enters directly into Downtown crossing over the railroad bridge adjacent to Hardin Park. Downtown's appearance and edge from this approach needs improvement, especially in wayfinding/signage, landscaping, and identification. Entering Downtown from Clark Street the primary access intersections are Liberty, Promenade, Jackson and Monroe Streets. From the east, Business 54 runs along Liberty and intersects with Coal, Jefferson, Washington, and Clark Streets. These intersections are where stronger edges and a tangible definition of Downtown is most needed.

Finding one's way to Downtown Mexico surprisingly can be a challenge. As stated previously, Clark and Liberty Streets are indirectly connected to State Highway 54 which bypasses the city to the south and east. However, within the city, Business 54 also diverts around Downtown as it leaves Clark Street and goes east along Boulevard to eventually join Liberty Street about 6 blocks east of the Village Square. There is also a clear lack of signage along these roads directing travelers to Downtown, specifically at key intersections. A simple and well defined wayfinding system would be very helpful especially for out of town visitors. In addition, the streets immediately around the Square are one-way and contribute to more confusion once a visitor



Audrain County Courthouse



Map of the city showing location of Downtown Mexico

Mexico, Missouri

arrives to Downtown.

Due to the general visual clutter and lack of architectural character found along these typical highway environments, the Village Square has an opportunity to enhance it's uniqueness as a traditional American downtown. Improvements to the edge along Clark Street and to the building facades around the Square will help to distinguish Downtown as a destination which is unique and of a higher quality, distinct from the highway corridor areas.

Downtown Mexico's buildings have experienced transformation through the years. Unfortunately, much of the transformation has been to a negative effect through the installation of inappropriate siding, awnings, signage, and neglect. Rehabilitation of the building facades is a needed improvement which could contribute to the identity of Downtown. There are also a few buildings/spaces in the Village Square which are vacant. These structures/sites have varying levels of maintenance and can unfortunately present a negative image for Downtown. At the same time, the city has recently taken strides in upgrading the energy efficiency of historic buildings, thanks to an "Energize Missouri" grant from the Department of Natural Resources. The city is also engaging in other projects like the revitalization of the former JCPenny building on Washington.

The Downtown businesses are a mix of retail shops, professional offices, banks and restaurants. With three quilt stores, an antique store and one of the few scrapbooking stores in the region, the Village Square has a lot to offer craftspeople. The city is also home to the Missouri Military Academy, Miss Missouri pageant, and has several tourist attractions including the Presser Performing Arts Center, Graceland Museum and American Saddlebred Horse Museum, the historic Country School and Country Church, and Simmons Stables.

The events and festivals in Downtown Mexico attract tourists, customers, and local citizens. Mexico's largest annual event is the Miss Missouri Scholarship Pageant held in June. Other events include the Mexico Area Farmers' Market, Festival of the Arts at Missouri Military Academy, a summer concert series at Hardin Park, the Prairie Pine Quilt Guild Quilt Show, Audrain County 4-H & Youth Fair, Audrain AgriFest, Sunset Festivals in September, the Country Fair/Walk Back in Time, Halloween Happening at Scattering Fork and holiday activities throughout December.



Example of current wayfinding signage for visitors to Downtown Mexico



Downtown buildings on Washington Street

Mexico, Missouri

Organizational Structure

Currently, Mexico has a very loose organizational structure among the individuals and groups advocating for revitalization of the community, particularly in the Village Square. At the present time, the Village Square Association is run entirely by volunteers and has little allocated funding.

There are also other interested parties, such as the City of Mexico's economic development arm, the Mexico Area Chamber of Commerce and Mexico's Community Betterment Committee. However, at times collaboration between these different groups has been a challenge. An example of this is the lack of a regular maintenance schedule for the Village Square, relying solely on ad hoc volunteerism to do litter control, minor repairs, landscaping and other beautification efforts. That situation is further frustrated by the lack of a paid executive director, or prominent board chair, for the VSA. Without an advocate/decision maker, Village Square is not an integral part of communitywide conversations about economic development opportunities.

Traditional Media and Promotions

Mexico is marketed via different formats including brochures, newsletters, and billboards. The marketing materials produced by various organizations are fairly well done, but there are many other ways to market the city and the Village Square.

There are three media outlets that serve Mexico and its primary market. The *Mexico Ledger* is the city's daily newspaper, published Monday through Friday. It is delivered in Mexico and 17 surrounding towns and has a robust online version that pulls content from newswires and other regional newspapers. It does not feature any blogs. On the radio, Mexico is home to KWWR 96 FM (country music) with a reach that extends to central and northeast Missouri and west-central Illinois. Also broadcasting from Mexico is 1340 AM KXEO (news/talk), reaching Audrain and surrounding counties. There are several additional media outlets in neighboring or nearby communities, especially in the cities of Columbia, Jefferson City, Fulton and Moberly.

In addition to media, the Mexico Area Chamber of Commerce creates and distributes *Mainstreet News* on a monthly basis. It is available both in print and online. The newsletter-style publication contains both



The former JC Penny Building at the corner of Washington & Monroe Streets



"Walk Back In Time" held annually in September at the Historical Museum

relevant community information and details about upcoming events. The Mexico Tourism Commission also invests annually in some paid advertising, funded by the city's \$40,000 to \$60,000 annual hotel/motel tax.

Online Assets and Search

The city's official website (mexicomissouri.net) makes no mention of the Village Square, though it could easily be integrated under the "working," "living" and/or "visiting" tabs on the site. The DREAM Initiative is highlighted, but as a subset of "city government" instead of as an economic development tool or integrated into a separate profile of the Village Square.

The city does have a lot of relevant statistics and factual information to support a business' decision to relocate to Mexico. However, there is nowhere online to see photos of available space or learn specifications. Further, a lot of the information is presented as a report, rather than a persuasive piece meant to draw new businesses to the community.

An online brochure detailing the "Top Six Reasons to Relocate to Mexico, Missouri" is clearly geared towards a residential audience. It includes information about affordable housing, but does not mention affordable retail space or access to a solid market. It lists excellent schools, but doesn't highlight the community's educated workforce.

The Mexico Area Chamber of Commerce (mexico-chamber.org) website gives a clearer view of Village Square, but only for dedicated users who are willing to do some extra navigation. The chamber's online photo tour has both historic and modern photos interspersed, at times leaving the user wondering what a particular building or streetscape looks like today. The photos can only be viewed as a slideshow, making it difficult for people to quickly navigate to the areas that most interest them. Further, without taking a screen capture, it is not possible to save and share images.

There is an interactive four-color brochure on the site that provides a great introduction to the community, complete with a detailed map, photos and sidebars on many of the parks and attractions. However, it doesn't make mention of a central and historic Village Square with shopping and dining opportunities. The site does include an online events calendar that promotes several of the Village Square activities.

While the chamber website includes good information for residents looking to relocate to the city, it does not provide anything for businesses considering locating in the area or link back to the city's economic development engine.



"Mainstreet News" published monthly by the Mexico Chamber



City of Mexico Website page

It appears that the primary site for people seeking tourist information about the city belongs to the Audrain County Historical Society (audrain.org). While this site provides a good overview of several of Mexico's individual attractions, it does not give a good context of their relation to the Village Square and other shopping or dining opportunities while visiting Mexico.

There are several traditional and digital resources that businesses and tourists can use to find information about Mexico, but little showcasing the Village Square. A Google search of "Mexico, Missouri Village Square" yields results pointing to events listings on lasr.net and virtualcities.com, with the unofficial site mexicommo.net fourth on the list. None of the city's official properties show up on the first page of search results. Just Googling "Mexico, Missouri" does bring up several of the city's official sites on the first page of search results. The city's official website is the second result (after Google maps), with a Wikipedia entry on the city in the third spot, the *Mexico Ledger* fifth and chamber seventh.

Social Media

Neither the city nor the Village Square has a strong presence in social media. Mexico, Missouri, and Audrain County both have pages, but they simply provide community information, re-

lated posts and the city's Wikipedia entry. They do not engage in actively sharing information about the community or its events.

The Presser Performing Arts Center has both a Facebook page and Twitter feed. Additional community Facebook pages include the very active Mexico Department of Public Safety page with frequent posts about emergency responses, arrests made by the Mexico Police Department and citywide safety concerns. It also posts helpful tips, such as reminding people to change smoke detector batteries. The Mexico Historical Society Museum and Mexico Area Farmers' Market also have pages on Facebook and post updates one to two times monthly.

Recently, a unique voice for the city surfaced on Facebook. A goat that wandered the streets of town quickly found himself a Facebook sensation. Within about 10 days of initial posting, the [Mexico Goat](#) had gathered more than 8,300 fans. Fortunately, one of his "favorite pages" was the Mexico Department of Public Safety. (Understandably, he also followed the mystery monkey of Tampa Bay.) Up until his recent capture, he mainly posted about life as a goat about town, but had also written about the first day of school, safety and even the weather.

The city's website has a "City News" section that functions similar to a blog, but doesn't invite comments, include a subscription via RSS feed



Mexico Area Chamber of Commerce website page



Audrain County Historical Society website page

option or have a “face” associated with the posts. A mother from Mexico who calls herself “[Lazy Susie](#)” has a well-recognized blog among homeschoolers and posts frequently. Other than that, there doesn’t appear to be many prominent or influential blogs in the region.

Moving Forward

With limited available resources, Mexico has made significant strides towards promoting the image of the city and attracting tourism to the area. However, with a little additional investment of both time and resources, Mexico, in particular the VSA, can use communications and marketing to expand the city’s reach. On the following pages are five key objectives for a long-range communications plan in order to move Downtown Mexico towards its strategic goals.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES:

The following text outlines the specific objectives and strategies for the marketing of Downtown Mexico. Each of the goals are discussed in greater detail on the following pages.

Objective 1: Engage Mexico Residents in the Future of Village Square

With a paid executive director and by engaging more residents as members, the Village Square Association can increase its impact exponentially.

Objective 2: Strengthen the Mexico Brand

Clearing up confusion around competing taglines and defining the city's heart and soul can help the community differentiate itself and become more competitive in the region.

Objective 3: Improve Mexico's Reputation in the Region and State

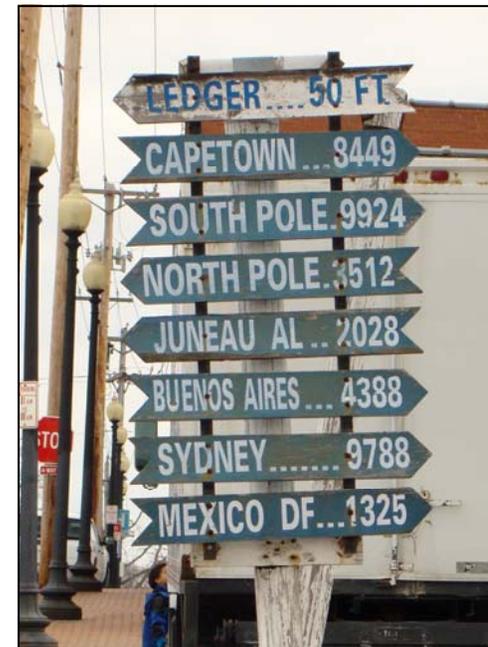
By establishing a thought leadership position in key industries and taking part in regional coalitions, Mexico can improve its position and draw additional investment.

Objective 4: Increase Business Investment and Retail Sales in the Village Square

The Village Square has quality available storefronts and interesting niche markets that could be attractive for small business owners.

Objective 5: Establish Mexico as a Tourist Destination

With little additional investment of capital or labor, Mexico tourism could expand greatly to reach entirely new audiences.



Old signpost in Downtown Mexico

OBJECTIVE 1: Engage Mexico Residents in the Future of Village Square

With existing budget constraints, community engagement is going to be the determining factor in the advancement of the Village Square. Getting key stakeholders engaged and invested in the project will provide the needed catalyst for change.

Strategy 1.1 - Involve residents and opinion leaders in Village Square decisions. An important first step is to involve the community in major decisions that will impact the Village Square. By getting buy-in early on, members of the community will feel more invested in the process and will be more likely to volunteer their time, make donations to capital improvement campaigns, advocate on behalf of the VSA to elected officials and sustain initiatives long-term.

Tactics for community engagement:

- **Expand the role of the Community Betterment Committee or create a separate committee structure to support the VSA.** A strong VSA could become involved with several different initiatives, ranging from recruiting businesses to planning community events and attracting tourists. These different activities could each be directed by a specialized sub-committee, fostering subject matter expertise and engaging more Mexico residents.
- **Identify and meet with key opinion leaders.** Leadership at the VSA should explore who are the influential decision-makers in Mexico — business leaders, educators, tourism directors, retailers, elected officials,

city planners and others. After identifying the most influential players, the VSA should arrange one-on-one or small group meetings to discuss:

1. The opinion leaders' priorities and vision for the future of the Village Square
 2. The VSA's initiatives, soliciting feedback and requesting support where applicable
 3. The possibility of a defined role for that individual as part of the Community Betterment Committee or a VSA board of advisors.
- **Hold frequent town hall-style meetings.** Invite people to stay up-to-date on Village Square plans with small town hall meetings, coffee and donut-style casual gatherings or by hosting relevant guest speakers such as Mexico resident and former Governor and Senator Kit Bond. In addition, these meetings may also be used for semi-regular clean-up and maintenance projects and to help bring in more volunteers.
 - **Maintain a community blog.** Either in conjunction with the *Mexico Ledger* or as an independent publication by the VSA, City of Mexico or Mexico Chamber of Commerce, create and maintain a blog that informs residents of community improvements, special events or other activities of interest. Select a single voice to blog that would appeal to various audiences, like the mayor, or ask several community leaders to be bloggers. Invite comments, and include a way to subscribe to new posts with an RSS feed.

Target Market:

- Village Square Association
- City of Mexico (staff and elected officials)
- Audrain County (staff and elected officials)
- Chamber officials and members
- Property Owners
- Business Owners
- Residents
- Professionals
- School Groups
- Church Groups
- Retirees

Strategy 1.2 - Increase local participation in Village Square activities and events. Before large numbers of tourists will travel to visit the Village Square, residents need to be fully on board. In addition to taking advantage of annual events and day-to-day Downtown shopping and dining opportunities, it is important to strengthen the sense of community pride.

Tactics to increase local engagement in the Village Square:

- **Expand membership in the Village Square Association.** Currently, VSA membership is largely limited to local businesses. Through a membership campaign, Mexico residents could sign-up to make contributions towards the future of the Downtown and receive certain privileges like:
 1. Retailer discounts
 2. Discounted admission to certain tourist sites
 3. A special publication
 4. Member appreciation events
 5. Stickers and/or storefront signs that express people are proud members
- **Create a social media presence.** Only if it can be maintained, engage in social networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to keep community residents informed about upcoming events and activities, as well as the latest community developments.
 1. Follow or “like” other Mexico social media assets to better integrate communitywide messages into VSA posts, where applicable.

2. Ask existing Mexico social media assets to integrate VSA messages into their communications. For example, the Mexico Goat could talk about how he plans to “hoof it” to an event Downtown.

- **Establish an opt-in e-mail list.** Allow people to opt for the latest news and developments in Mexico’s Village Square. E-mails could promote special shopping days, events, family activities or even public safety information. In addition to being able to spread news to an interested and engaged audience, an e-mail list will allow the VSA to establish a database of individuals for volunteer opportunities and advocacy efforts. This could pair with, or expand upon, the city’s current “notify me” list.

Strategy 1.3 - Secure funding for a full-time manager of the Village Square Association. Without someone paid to direct the VSA, it is difficult to keep the organization as a priority and coordinate its many responsibilities. An executive director of the organization would also provide a much-needed advocate for Downtown in conversations about economic development, tourism and citywide infrastructure improvements. Tactics to generate revenue for a VSA executive director:

- **Write a job description.** The first step towards establishing a funded executive director position is to detail what will be the individual’s responsibilities, reporting structure, evaluation criteria and any budget-impacting factors like salary and benefits. An example job description was provided in the Organizational Structure Review task item within DREAM.

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- **Formulate a long-term business plan.** Funding an executive director would likely require passage of a Community Improvement District (CID) or Tax Increment Financing (TIF) plan. Voters aren't likely to pass tax increases to fund a single job, so there should also be revenue built in for streetscape improvements, facade improvements, etc. Before moving forward, the VSA must clearly establish how much money is needed and what that revenue stream would fund.
- **Seed the idea of a Downtown CID or TIF with key opinion leaders, and establish an advocacy coalition.** It could appear self-serving for the current head of the VSA to lobby for a tax district that would, in turn, provide that individual with a salary. Instead, the VSA should pull together credible third-party advocates that can lobby on the VSA's behalf. This group should include influencers in the city. Some of them should come from the proposed tax district, but it is not necessary that all live or do business within the CID or TIF boundaries.
- **Equip the advocacy coalition with materials to engage voters.** Set a defined timeline, such as two to three months, for the group to have completed one-on-one meetings with everyone in the voting block. For those meetings, have some information/promotion materials that are of appropriate quality (not glossy or expensive looking). This can include a basic fact sheet on the Village Square proposal as well as a Q&A document on CIDs/TIFs in general. Be sure to address:
 1. Potential revenue and jobs that will be generated by a revitalized Village Square
 2. Tangible improvements that would be made to the Village Square with new funding
 3. Importance of the funding to the future viability of the community
 4. Information about how increasing sales taxes has a negligible financial impact on retail sales
 5. Examples of other communities in Missouri and throughout the Midwest who have done similar projects successfully, like Downtown Springfield and Columbia

Target Market:

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OBJECTIVE 2: Strengthen the Mexico Brand

Currently, there appears to be confusion about what constitutes Mexico’s “brand.” Competing taglines can be seen on materials produced by the city and the chamber of commerce, and there is little that gives a single sense of place. With a wealth of valuable attractions, Mexico has the opportunity to differentiate itself among neighboring communities.

Strategy 2.1 - Determine the “brand essence” of the city. Brand essence is that often intangible sense of what something is “known for” in the minds of customers and stakeholders. It is what causes people to make an emotional connection with a brand and what leaves a lasting impression. A good rule of thumb for Mexico would be to piece together a short sentence or phrase (six words or less) that describes the competencies, culture, advantages and values of the city. While logos and taglines come and go, brand essence should reflect the timeless elements ascribed to the brand. For example, Nike’s brand essence of “authentic athletic performance” has been translated into slogans like “Just do it!” and “I can.”

Having a solid understanding of Mexico’s brand essence is critical to better telling the city’s story both with words and pictures. Each phrase and image selected to promote the city should complement and reinforce the underlying brand essence.

Tactics to determine Mexico’s brand essence:

- **Comb through existing primary and secondary research.** Read through plans for past communications campaigns, focus group reports, newspaper articles and notes from Village Square Association and Mexico City Council meetings. If necessary, conduct additional surveys or focus groups to uncover:
 1. Key words and phrases that help paint a picture of the community
 2. Factors that set Mexico apart from neighboring communities, including business strengths, local events and attractions as well as special talents like workforce preparedness or areas of expertise
 3. Mexico’s ideal target audience and how the city is currently perceived in the marketplace
- **Conduct a facilitated brainstorm with a diverse group of stakeholders.** Bring together a small group of people (fewer than 20) that includes stakeholders like elected officials, business owners and residents. In addition to investing community members in the process, this will provide a necessary diversity of opinion. Before the brainstorm, write a creative brief that includes keywords identified in the research to help structure the session and keep ideas relevant. Engage participants in silent and group brainstorming to ensure every voice is heard and ideas build upon each other. Ask participants to evaluate essence statements against the following criteria:
 1. Is it simply stated from the audience point of view?
 2. Is it, at most, a short phrase that requires no explanation?

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- School Groups
- Church Groups
- MMA Students and Families
- Miss Missouri Pageant Officials

3. Is it honest and authentic?
 4. Is it true of the brand (City of Mexico) as well as sub-brands (Village Square, Chamber of Commerce, Audrain Historical Society, etc.)?
 5. Is it relevant across geography? Will audiences from different parts of the state or country react the same way?
 6. Does it enable growth?
 7. Is it potentially own-able, or could another city lay claim to the same essence? If so:
 - Does it tap into a higher-order emotional benefit?
 - Has it been present from the beginning?
- **Narrow results.** Have a smaller group of core decision-makers re-evaluate possible brand essence statements against the criteria and narrow the field to the top three to five.
 - **Test results.** Through focus groups and/or surveys, test the top three to five statements with a larger group of stakeholders to determine what Mexico residents, retailers, and other opinion leaders believe are the core attributes of the city.

Strategy 2.2 - Resolve theme/tagline confusion. Currently, there are several slogans and taglines that Mexico entities use in promotions. The most prevalent is "Mainstreet of the Midwest." However, others include "Your Kind of Town," "Discover the Mexico Difference," "Firebrick Capital of the World" and "Mexico is Home." Having a single overarching theme with several sub-themes can be very effective in establishing a strong

brand. However, the themes typically tie together and somehow feel related. For example, General Electric has a slogan of "imagination at work," and its environmentally focused product category is called "ecomagination." The two are distinct and different, but related, and both work to reinforce GE's position as imaginative and innovative. "Discover the Mexico Difference" and "Mainstreet of the Midwest", don't have that same interlocking feel.

A tagline should also tell a distinct story, like how Subway's "Eat Fresh" instantly communicates ingredient quality. Other good taglines include: YouTube's "Broadcast Yourself", iPod's "1,000 songs in your pocket" and Edward Jones' "Making Sense of Investing." While Mexico's primary theme of "Mainstreet of the Midwest" is catchy, it doesn't communicate much about Mexico or differentiate it from other Midwestern communities. It's also somewhat confusing, considering that Mexico's Downtown has a distinct name and identity as the Village Square, not Mainstreet.

Tactics to develop a theme and/or sub-themes for Mexico:

- **Examine the brand essence research.** Any slogan or tagline should pull through the essence of the Mexico and Mexico Village Square brands. Brand essence and the slogan can be the same, such as The Nature Conservancy's "saving great places". However, they can also differ. Disney's essence of "fun family entertainment" translates to a variety of slogans like "the happiest place on earth" and "dreams come true." Examining the primary and secondary research that feeds into the brand essence conversation will help determine the best keywords to use.

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- MMA Students and Families
- Miss Missouri Pageant Officials

- **Brainstorm.** Again, brainstorming with key stakeholders who represent various backgrounds can help the city come up with options that speak to different audiences. In the case of a tagline, it should be short, impactful and memorable. Here are four important criteria:

1. Things important to Mexico tourists, residents and potential retailers
2. Real strengths of the community
3. Mexico's competitive advantage
4. Communicability

- **Narrow results.** Evaluating against the criteria, narrow the field to the top three to five taglines for the city, along with possible sub-themes or secondary taglines for other community entities like the Village Square Association.

- **Test results.** Through focus groups and/or surveys, test the shortened list with a larger group that includes people in Mexico as well as stakeholders from other parts of the state, including state agencies like the Missouri Division of Tourism.

Strategy 2.3 - Make a stronger presence for Village Square in existing communications. Currently, there is little online or in print material that distinguishes the Village Square from the rest of the community. While the chamber and city websites reference events taking place in the Village Square, there is no description of the Village Square to be found. This leaves it without its own identity or distinct sense of place. Tactics to improve the presence of Village Square:

- **Conduct a thorough website audit.** Currently, the VSA doesn't have a presence online and the city, chamber and Audrain County Historical Society websites don't have specific promotions of the Village Square. When searching for shopping and dining opportunities, there are lists of options, but nothing that shows their relationship to each other or that creates a feeling of "critical mass" in one particular part of town. To best determine where that information should be housed, the VSA should begin with a comprehensive audit of the current three prominent sites. Some points to consider:

1. The City of Mexico's website has an attractive homepage; however, the user is quickly directed away by links to external websites in the top navigation bar. All top navigation should direct users to information within the site content, with links to external sites housed on sub-pages
2. On the City of Mexico's website, it is difficult to locate navigation back to the home page because it is hidden under the logo
3. Most of the information on the Mexico Chamber of Commerce website is geared towards potential residents, with little for businesses that may want to locate in the area. There is information for businesses on the city website, but it is somewhat difficult to locate and phrased more as a report than a sales pitch.

Target Market:

- Village Square Association
- City of Mexico (staff and elected officials)
- Audrain County (staff and elected officials)
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- Miss Missouri Pageant Officials

- **Create a web presence for Mexico's Village Square.** Determine where the information should be hosted, whether it should be its own entity or live as a subset of the city or chamber websites. Once that is determined, create prominent links to the page from all three sites.
- **Optimize the websites for search.** When people are seeking information, most turn to Google. There is a special trust and authority given to websites that have the number one or two page rank for a given search. With "Mexico, Missouri," the city and chamber both have good page rankings. However, the results for "Mexico, Missouri Village Square" are weak. To improve the page rank:
 1. Research keywords and include as many as possible on the home page of the website or "one click away" from the homepage. Google.com/ads/adwords is a free resource to find keyword ideas.
 2. Link with other sites. Google and other search engines recognize sites based on the amount of interconnectivity they have. Interlinking serves as a form of external validation, letting the search engine know that this is more likely to be the "official" site or one that is highly influential. Here are some possible links that could be included in a page specific to the Village Square (Note: Some of the following links are already included in one or more of the Mexico web properties):
 - DREAM website, the sites of the sponsoring agencies and all Mexico-specific DREAM reports

- Mexico Ledger, KWWR 96 FM and 1340 AM KXEO
- Area tourist attractions
- Downtown organizations in neighboring communities or other DREAM cities
- Any Village Square businesses
- City of Mexico, Mexico Chamber of Commerce and Audrain County Historical Society sites

- **Integrate Village Square into existing brochures.** The beautifully designed and interactive brochure on the Mexico Chamber of Commerce website has several call-outs featuring specific areas of the community and special events. However, other than mentioning that a few of the retailers are located "in the Village Square area," there is no description of this important and attractive community asset.
- **Partner with Mexico-area groups using social media.** Ask Mexico entities that have a presence on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or other social networks to "like" any new Mexico social media properties, as recommended in the first objective under community engagement.
 1. Work with Mexico groups to co-promote special initiatives and events.
 2. Consider building new events or digital engagements that would both add fun engagement opportunities for residents and strengthen the community identity, like a video contest that centers on the secret life of the Mexico Goat.

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Strategy 2.4 - Address the “other” Mexico. While many Mexico residents may understand the name of their community, it creates confusion with outsiders. Intentional or not, people hear “Mexico,” and their minds wander south of the border. While it shouldn’t necessarily be the focal point of the city’s brand, avoiding the comparison entirely might be a missed opportunity. Instead, the city’s name could appeal to new audiences who may not even realize that there is a Mexico, Missouri.

Tactics to capitalize on the Mexico name:

- **Develop key messages.** Explanations of Mexico’s naming vary slightly depending on whether someone inquiring is consulting the city’s website, chamber website or Wikipedia. From the folksy “not wanting to take down the old sign” to admiration of Texas independence, there is some confusion on the story. Why is Mexico named Mexico, and why are residents called Mexicoans? The city should establish key messages on the topic that could be used by a variety of groups interested in promoting the town.
 1. Because it is such a point of interest, the answer should be listed on any “frequently asked questions” about the city.
 2. A fun fact about the city, this information could also be used as introductory copy in brochures and on websites.
- **Create viral videos.** Video is one of the most impactful and cost effective ways to spread a message. In 2010, two-thirds of US internet users watch some

form of online video content at least once per month. Videos that are either touching or humorous, and under a minute in length, often can be spread virally reaching thousands to millions of viewers. There are several fun topics that Mexico could use for viral videos, ending the segments with the city’s tagline and web address. The city could use the videos to showcase the city (as a backdrop), serve as a teaser to a community event (“Discover the real answer...”), as part of a contest or just for fun. Some possible themes include:

1. “How did Mexico get its name?” People from across the state (possibly Miss Missouri contestants) could try to answer the question in a funny compellation of mistaken answers.
 2. “I’m a Mexicoan.” In a humorous (but not insensitive) take, people from Mexico, Missouri and people from the country of Mexico could explain a few of the cultural differences between the two locations.
 3. “International Missouri.” A roving reporter could head across the state to interview residents of cities named after other places, providing a fun look at Missouri modifications, like Mexicoans instead of Mexicans, New MAD-rid instead of New MADRID, Ver-SAILS instead of Ver-SAI, Ne-VA-da instead of Ne-va-da, etc.
- **Develop a cultural heritage celebration.** Even though Mexico doesn’t have a large Hispanic presence, the city has a name that lends well to a fiesta or southwestern-themed festival. The Hispanic population overall is growing quickly in western and mid-

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Missouri. Additionally, Mexico is situated near several communities that this type of festival could appeal to, including college towns like Columbia and Fulton. Even though it is further away, Hermann draws from those same markets for its annual celebrations of German culture, Maifest and Oktoberfest. Plus, the Village Square provides a great venue and should be utilized more for such events. Possible themes for a new festival include:

1. Keeping with its own legacy, Mexico could celebrate the very spirit of westward migration and the American southwest that inspired the city's name. The festival could have a feeling akin to a visit to the Alamo, featuring Texas-style barbeque and Mexican folkloric dancers. It could also tap into the city's existing appeal to horse lovers with rides and demonstrations. As a fun "co-promotion," the city could also include artisans from Texas County, Missouri, just a three-hour drive south. An opportunity also exists for some catchy naming possibilities, such as "MoMex Festival."
2. The city could also revisit the idea of holding a street party in the Village Square in conjunction with Cinco de Mayo (May 5) or Mexican Independence Day (September 16). The event could feature Mexican food, music, and crafts.
3. Another option would be to hold an art fair, featuring the work of artisans from Audrain County and the City of Mexico, as well as artists from the region, with a particular emphasis on artists and works from the American southwest.



Although not located in the Village Square, the Miss Missouri Pageant (above) and the Walk Back In Time festival (below) are held annually in Mexico, Missouri



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OBJECTIVE 3: Improve Mexico's Reputation in the Region and State

By establishing a thought leadership position in key industries and taking part in regional coalitions, Mexico can improve its position and draw additional investment into the city.

Strategy 3.1 - Strengthen relationships with neighboring communities. Mexico is a regional draw, attracting visitors and shoppers from Vandalia, Laddonia, Martinsburg, Auxvasse, Wellsville and Centralia. In that position, Mexico could take the lead on a coalition that would strengthen both Mexico and surrounding communities, in turn leading to more visitors and shoppers in the city. Tactics to strengthen relationships:

- **Form a regional coalition.** Invite mayors, city managers and planners, city council members, business leaders, representatives of the media, directors of Downtown organizations, members of the Mid-Missouri Regional Planning Commission and others in a small but highly engaged and influential group. It could include both voting and non-voting members. As examples, the East-West Gateway Council of Governments is a coalition between Missouri and Illinois in the St. Louis area and the Northwest Missouri Regional Council of Governments serves several counties near the Iowa and Nebraska borders.
- **Advance regional priorities.** Through the coalition and committees that report into the coalition, take real action towards advancing community and regional goals.

1. Partner with other communities to co-promote events and initiatives. Through traditional and social media channels, Mexico can promote events happening in nearby communities and ask those communities' channels to do the same.
2. Meet regularly to exchange ideas about what is right for the region and what could be a potential draw to businesses, shoppers, and tourists.
3. Form regional appeals for state and federal funds for infrastructure and other applicable projects.

Strategy 3.2 - Establish a thought leadership position, specifically in plant science, biofuels, refractory brick and equestrian sciences. There are several hobbies and industries where Mexico can establish itself as an expert at the forefront of innovations in the field. By tapping into the talents of outspoken townspersons and becoming more creative with media outreach, Mexico can give itself a stronger voice in statewide conversations. Tactics to establish Mexico as a thought leader:

- **Identify spokespersons in areas of expertise.** Identify and engage Mexicoans who work in these areas who would be willing to conduct media interviews, participate in speaking engagements or meet with businesses considering relocating to Mexico.
 1. Think of potential media storylines that could tap into these individuals' expertise and what media would be most interested in covering those types of stories. Then, reach out to those publications to introduce the spokesperson. For example, an expert on saddlebred horses could interest *Saddle & Bridle* magazine.

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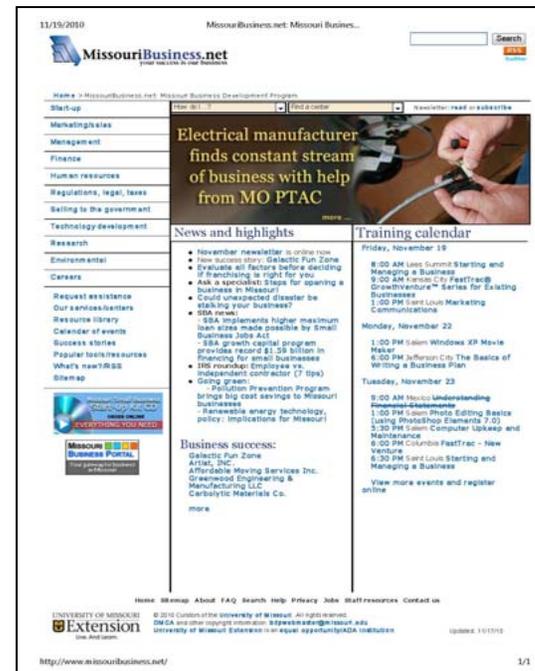
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2. Introduce spokespersons as subject matter experts to associations and state agencies that cater to that particular topic or audience, such as the American Saddlebred Horse Association.
3. Ask spokespersons to hold seminars or informal gatherings for people in Mexico and throughout the region, reinforcing the city's position as a thought leader in that area.

- **Conduct traditional and social media outreach.** Identify stories in the city that could attract an outside audience. Then, identify the correct publications to pitch with the idea. For example, a story about a biofuels innovation could interest *Biomass* magazine. Information specifically on advancements in the Village Square and its role in the DREAM Initiative could appeal to the Reimagine Rural blog (reimaginerural.com). Stories profiling new small businesses in the region could interest smallbizsurvival.com, a blog focused on business in rural areas and small towns, or the more widely read missouribusiness.net. Once a solid story line is identified, there are several outlets (on and offline) that Mexico could approach.

- **Have conversations with state agencies, legislators and associations.** In addition to introducing spokespersons, ask representatives of the community to talk with statewide agencies like the Departments of Tourism and Economic Development, key legislators and associations like the Missouri Chamber of Commerce to keep Mexico at the forefront of conversations about plant sciences, biofuels, refractory brick, equestrian sciences and other areas important to the community.



The MissouriBusiness.net website showcases The University of Missouri Extension's Business Development Program .

OBJECTIVE 4: Increase Business Investment and Retail Sales in the Village Square

Mexico has unique shops and attractions that bring in people from outside the community. Now, it is time to expand that reach and establish the city as a specialty shopping destination. The city also has quality available storefronts for businesses looking to enter the market. By making information about available real estate and small business opportunities more easily accessible, Mexico can make strides in attracting new retailers to the Village Square.

Strategy 4.1 - Raise awareness of specialty merchandise currently available in Mexico. Mexico has a niche position in mid-Missouri with the only scrapbooking store in the area, three quilt stores, antique shops and several custom-made furniture stores. There are several ways to draw attention to those assets to draw additional shoppers to the area.

Tactics to raise awareness of specialty retail:

- **Purchase Google and/or Facebook ads.** Google and Facebook ads are highly efficient. They only cost when someone clicks on the ad, and they can be micro-targeted down to the specific zip code where the search is being made. So, if someone in Moberly searches for “quilts,” Google could deliver an ad that says, “Shop three quilt stores in Mexico, Missouri’s Village Square.” Please note that the cost of ads varies based on the uniqueness and desirability of the search term. For example, the generic term “ice cream” costs more than “Baskin-Robbins.”

1. Determine which search terms are most relevant for Village Square retailers. Again, Google.com/ads/adwords can help retailers find keyword ideas.
 2. If possible, work in partnership with retailers to pay for advertising in order to expand saturation and reach.
 3. Start small and examine the metrics. Both Google and Facebook provide ad buyers measurable insights on ad usage. Evaluate the results, and modify the ad buy accordingly to maximize efficacy.
- **Reach out to shoppers through social media and blogger outreach.** There are several specialty blogs and Facebook pages that center around quilts, antique collecting, scrapbooking and handcraft goods. Reach out to them to promote community events, like the Prairie Pine Quilt Guild Quilt Show or special shopping days.
 - **Conduct grassroots outreach in nearby communities.** Promote special events and shopping days in nearby communities.
 1. Consider having Mexico-based retailers travel to those communities to offer “how to” demonstrations in a variety of crafts and skills. Then, they can invite participants to visit Mexico.
 2. Hold specialty arts and crafts demonstrations in Mexico, such as how to cast firebrick or tips on how to use firebrick in landscaping and construction.

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- **Appeal to Mexicoans with a “buy local” campaign.** Several Mexico retailers are part of the 3/50 Project that encourages people to support locally owned businesses. That campaign could be reinforced with a VSA-run local pride campaign. Local businesses could receive a sticker or storefront sign that identified them as Mexico-owned and operated.

Strategy 4.2 - Highlight available storefronts. Mexico has quality available first- and second-story retail space available in the Village Square. By promoting the space both online and offline and using grassroots outreach, Mexico can increase demand for these desirable properties.

Tactics to increase retail demand:

- **Create an online resource hub for business owners looking to locate in Mexico.** As previously discussed, most of Mexico’s digital properties target a residential audience instead of a business audience, or they are report-oriented instead of persuasive. A separate page should be dedicated to opening a business in Mexico with:
 1. Photos and specifications of some of the available space
 2. Economic / demographic data
 3. Fact sheets on the workforce and the advantages of the region
 4. Information collected from surveys
 5. Frequently asked questions
 6. Contact information

- **Develop collateral materials that specifically promote upper-floor uses.** Sometimes it is difficult for developers, business owners and service providers to envision success in a second-story space. However, there are several situations that would lend themselves well to those locations. A fact sheet can be developed that:
 1. Details some of the advantages of second-story residential, office, and service uses
 2. Addresses concerns about inconvenience
 3. Suggests sectors that would do particularly well
 4. Lists success rates of second-story enterprises
- **Create a pseudo small-business incubator for Mexicoans.** An option, especially for second-story retail space, is to offer incentives and support for new local businesses that are willing to build their start-up in the Village Square. Starting a true business incubator would require a significant amount of collaboration between the VSA, City of Mexico and Mexico Area Chamber of Commerce. However, a scaled-back version could likely be put into effect quickly with little needed oversight.

Strategy 4.3 - Implement Façade Rehabilitation Program:

The DREAM Initiative surveys have documented that improvements to the facades of buildings would greatly improve the image of Downtown Mexico.

- **Utilize existing façade loan programs:** Capitalize on the local and state façade renovation programs, such as the Revolving Loan Program of the Missouri Development Finance board, to collaborate with owners in the rehabilitation of downtown buildings.

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Strategy 4.4 - Promote Village Square capital improvements to nearby markets. With façade renovations, new streetscapes and infrastructure improvements in and around the Village Square, the community will have more attractive and better equipped retail spaces than in the past. However, people in neighboring communities may not be aware of the changes. Tactics to inform neighboring markets about Mexico's community improvements:

- **Promote significant changes through traditional and social media outreach.** While minor improvements like new awnings aren't likely to generate attention, there are more significant initiatives that may interest local news outlets. For example, the *Mexico Ledger* might report on the capital improvements made possible by the Energize Missouri Grant.
- **Inform key opinion leaders about new streetscape elements and infrastructure.** Reach out to mayors, city planners, members of the media and retailers in neighboring communities and invite them on a guided tour of changes in Mexico's Village Square. If there is a ribbon-cutting on a significant renovation, such as the JC Penny building, invite them to attend.



Conceptual Downtown gateway monument and Clark St. bridge enhancements in Mexico, Missouri

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OBJECTIVE 5: Establish Mexico as a Tourist Destination

A vibrant tourism trade offers many potential benefits to a community. Tourism can help enhance the image of an area, increase local pride, and improve quality of life. As an industry, tourism is recognized as an important component of a diverse economy providing employment, redevelopment, and investment opportunity. All together, tourism can help to build a distinctive, unique, and productive community.

The economic benefits of tourism include job creation, as well as increased retail sales generation, essentially bringing new money into the community. The potential new retail sales from tourism can help to counter the changing nature of the retail environment, which has generally lead to a decline in sales tax revenues over the last few decades. While this effect is felt community-wide, it has had a particularly strong impact on many small downtowns. The attraction of new money to the community through tourism is an effective strategy to deal with the financial gap left by these trends as new money travels into and circulates throughout the community.

The positive effects of a successful tourism industry resonate through many business sectors, including non tourism-related businesses and the local community. The positive impacts will be felt by local businesses and residents alike. Local residents will benefit from added or improved visitor services and infrastructure, increased employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and improved shopping convenience and increased choice. A well balanced mix of retail, services, and recreation will make Downtown a destination, attractive to residents, visitors, and investors.

With little additional investment of capital or labor, Mexico tourism could expand greatly to reach entirely new audiences, and the length of stay for current Mexico visitors could be expanded to include overnight stays in the community.

Strategy 5.1 - Assessment of existing framework . Development of a tourism enhancement strategy, just as any business or product development strategy, begins with an evaluation of the relationship between product and customer in a competitive marketplace. The analysis of these relationships results in the development or identification of a competitive advantage. A competitive advantage gives a community an edge over its rivals and an ability to generate greater success. The more sustainable the competitive advantage, the more difficult it is for competitors to neutralize the advantage. Competitors in this scenario are other communities that are attempting to attract in whole, or large part, the same target market.

- **Determine the Product.** For the purposes of this analysis the product is Downtown, its amenities and environ including: businesses, restaurants, museums, infrastructure, people, streets, sidewalks, parks, events, etc. Downtown is evaluated in terms of a theme park or resort, striving to provide the same level of services. Downtown needs a balance of businesses and amenities that address, at a minimum, the basic needs of customers. A key to a successful product is maintaining focus on the primary product, service, or destination strengths, while at the same time adapting to changes and taking advantage of opportunities.

Target Market:

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- Retirees
- School Groups
- Church Groups
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- Cultural Tourists
- Food Tourists
- Cyclists
- Higher Income Shoppers
- Girlfriend Weekend Shoppers
- Mother/Daughter Shoppers

- **Determine the Customer.** The customer, in this evaluation, is the visitor or patron including residents of the community, neighboring areas, traditional tourists, etc. The community must understand who their customers are, who is currently visiting Downtown and why, as well as who they might be able to target and how. To understand and target customers, it is helpful to categorize visitors. A common categorization of visitors is by the reason for their visit:

Business Travelers—Most likely to travel during the week, driven by businesses, primarily basic needs of lodging, restaurants, services, gift shopping, and evening entertainment, potential to impress and return for pleasure.

Family Travelers—Most likely to travel during the weekend, driven by relatives, less likely to need lodging, potential needs of services and restaurants, general shopping.

Ethnic and Cultural Seekers—Looking for exposure to new experiences, development, and education. Interested in the area's "way of life" and people. Adventurous and looking for more than basic needs. Museums, galleries, concerts, festivals, and performances. Likely to shop for unique items.

Heritage and Passive Recreation Enthusiasts—This visitor enjoys the scenery and feel of the area more than the interaction with the people. They are more inwardly focused and reflective. Their needs are similar to the culture seeker, but are just as likely to enjoy a drive through town to look at architecture or a walk in the local parks.

Active Outdoor Adventurers—Intense enjoyers of the parks and natural areas. These sportsmen enjoy a wide variety and are not always young. Outdoorsmen, boaters, hikers, or golfers; they are on the move. They are devoted and spend money on their chosen sport.

Urban Entertainment—The shoppers, team sport spectators, college visitors, night owls, or amusement park attendees. They tend to travel in groups and have higher expendable incomes. Internet connectivity and cell phone access is important to them.

- **Market Positioning and Brand.** Once an understanding is reached on exactly what the product is and who the customers or target markets are, the focus turns to identifying the market positioning. An important component of a competitive advantage is a distinct market positioning and brand—something that draws on the strengths of the destination, its authenticity, and leverages customers' desire for unique experiences. It is essential to understand how customers currently perceive the destination, especially relative to competitors. This perception is the community's image or brand. The destination must craft a strategy that builds on the positive aspects of its current image and, if necessary, repositions it to a more advantageous and competitive position. Repositioning takes time, patience and persistence as it typically involves modifying previously held perceptions about your destination. Customers carry a preconceived idea of the destination's brand. The brand represents what people think of you—your image. The destination's brand is important as it is essentially a promise to provide a product or service in a consistent way.

Target Market:

- Chamber officials and members
- Miss Missouri Pageant Officials
- Property Owners
- Business Owners
- Residents
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Destination brands have four distinct components that make up brand image in the mind of the customer. Each component represents an opportunity to differentiate from competition and offer a unique consumer benefit. Destinations can reach their maximum potential by leveraging all four components. These include:

1. **Realm One—Place:** If you visit the Empire State Building, you go to a building with the city surrounding it. Up at the observation tower, the **place** becomes an oasis high above bustling Manhattan. What benefits does the place provide for the guest? Some people like the high energy feeling of being in the city, but they may also like taking a break from the intensity. People go to a destination. It exists in a physical place. A destination should try to get the most out of the power of its place.
2. **Realm Two—Experience:** Hike in the canyon. Ride the coaster. Attend a show. People want to do something at a destination—something unique, something to brag about, or something to share. The experience of a destination can provide key benefits to guests and a fundamental part of its brand. A destination can reach its full potential when it promotes the benefits of a unique experience and delivers.
3. **Realm Three—Mindset:** Sometimes a destination epitomizes or evokes an attitude, value, or mindset that has meaning beyond the physical limits of the site. Colonial Williamsburg set out to “own” the concept of Colonial America, and people might feel more patriotic just thinking about it. When a

destination can symbolize an inspirational concept, it can form a powerful connection with its guests. The destination becomes a touchstone for the concept and people return to renew their connection with it.

4. **Realm Four—Organization:** What role does the organization behind the destination play in the brand? The Niagara Parks emblem conveys tremendous trust among regional guests who want to spend their money with the organization that helps preserve the nature and heritage of Niagara Falls. The organizational dimension of a destination may also make a big difference to future employees, donors, business partners, granting agencies, or other organizations. People want to associate with a cause or organization they feel good about, one that expresses their own values and aspirations.

When people think of your destination, do they long to be in the place, get excited by the experience, aspire to the values represented, and trust the organization behind it? When you can answer ‘yes’ to all four, people will attribute a high value to your destination brand. That value is your destinations’ competitive advantage, which relates directly to attendance and financial success.

Strategy 5.2 - Establish the Hierarchy of Needs. Destinations and, in a larger sense, downtowns are basically customer-oriented businesses and therefore should always take the customer point-of-view. As stated earlier, when destinations conduct product development and determine marketing decisions they must address what the customer wants and needs.

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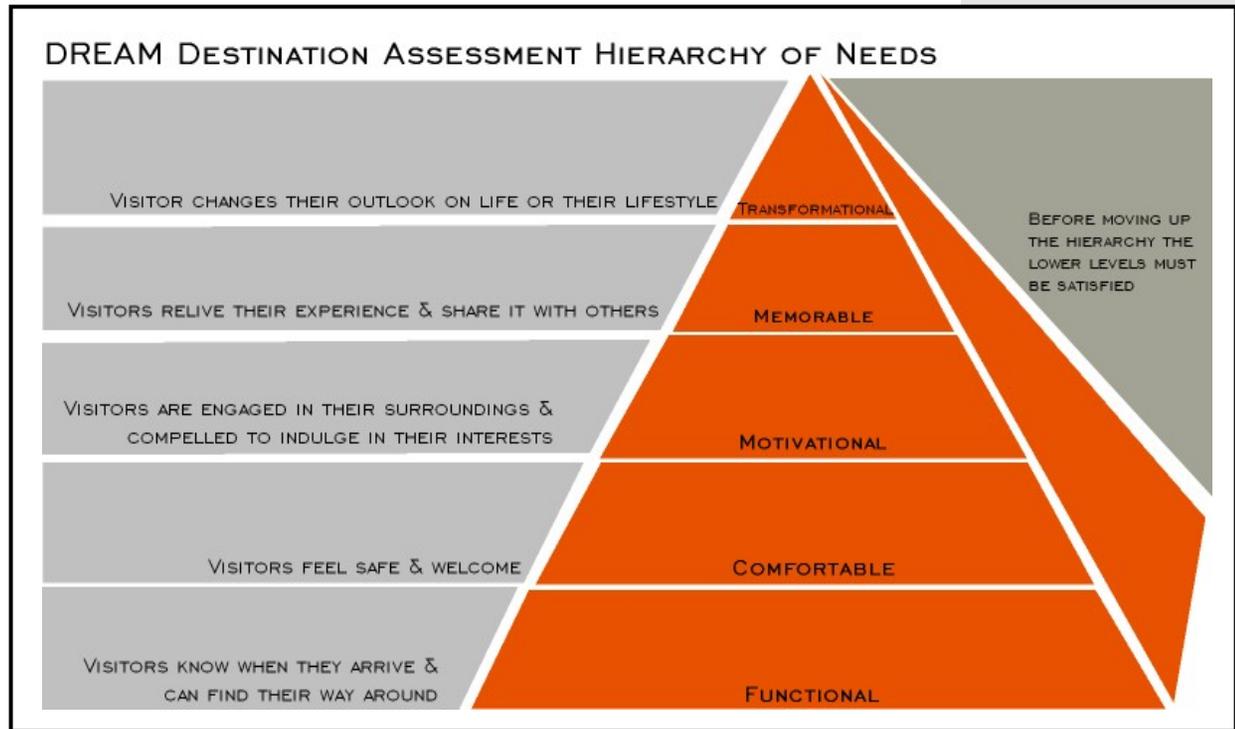
PGAV Planners uses the concept of a destination consumer “Hierarchy of Needs,” which hypothesizes that customers must have their most basic needs met before they can attain higher levels of fulfillment. This customer-focused theme will recur throughout the recommendations for each community.

There are a great number of reasons or desires that drive an individual consumer’s decision to travel and their choice of destination. The “Hierarchy of Needs” describes the requirements a typical visitor has to have met in order for them to have a fulfilling destination experience. Questions a destination community may ask themselves regarding whether or not their community’s destination assets meet these needs are:

1. Functional: Does the City provide adequate wayfinding to make travel throughout the area easy and somewhat intuitive? Do visitors know when they have “arrived”? Does the City adequately provide basic comforts, such as parking, bathrooms, and a place to rest? Is information about destinations and events easily attainable?
2. Comfortable: Is the downtown pedestrian friendly and well lit? Are the building facades and streetscape designs aesthetically pleasing? Are numerous lodging and dining options present throughout the municipality? Does the downtown provide adequate com-

forts so that the visitor can relax and get away from home?

3. Motivational: Does the downtown provide visitors with activities in which to participate? What will move the visitor to get out of their car and get involved? Does the downtown provide a chance to learn, interact with others, and an opportunity for adventure or escape?



For the purposes of this Destination Assessment, PGAV uses the hierarchical scheme shown here, listed from bottom to top, to illustrate and describe the motivations of the typical, “Downtown” Missouri tourist.

4. **Memorable:** Does the downtown leave the visitor with positive memories? Do visitors repeatedly return to downtown? Do visitors recommend a visit to downtown to others? Is there positive word-of-mouth about downtown?
5. **Transformational:** If the City meets the aforementioned needs, then they've created a fulfilling experience to the visitor, which, hopefully, will positively change the visitor; thus imbuing the visitor with not only a valuable rejuvenative experience, but also a new and positive outlook on life. The visitor will want to return to and reconnect with the destination to renew that positive outlook in the future. The visitor will actively seek to bring others and share the rejuvenative experience.

In the case of a visit to a destination like a resort, zoo, or theme park, a single organization manages the tourist experience to ensure a "seamless" experience; one that flows smoothly and consistently from parking and restrooms to attractions, food and shopping without breaks in the "brand." People have come to expect this level of product and service. Destination communities would benefit from emulating this model to the degree they can considering the complexity of their destination environment (i.e. multiple tourism product owners and interests). For example, Destination communities can develop organizational structures that support a coordinated aesthetic presentation of downtown; manage a consistent and unified marketing plan; administer special event planning; and guide businesses towards consistent business standards (i.e. uniform business hours).

Strategy 5.3 - Reach new audiences for day trips. Many people in mid-Missouri aren't aware of all that Mexico has to offer. Reaching entirely new audiences could add a valuable new revenue stream for the city. Further, those who come for a few hours would be more likely to return for a longer, perhaps overnight, stay in the future. Tactics to reach new audiences:

- **Cater to specialty groups.** There are several specialty groups that may be interested in a visit to Mexico, either coinciding with one of the city's festivals or just to visit attractions that appeal to them
 1. Taking a page from travel books, give potential tourists an idea of what they could expect to see and do during a day in Mexico by proposing sample itineraries. For example, the city could suggest a morning visit to the Graceland Museum, lunch and afternoon shopping in the Village Square and an afternoon trip to the farmer's market. Offer a variety of options that appeal to specific special interest groups:
 - Mexico for the arts and crafts lover
 - The horse-lover's Mexico
 - A "community overview" tour that would appeal to parents visiting their sons at Missouri Military Academy
 - A day that ends with the Miss Missouri Scholarship Pageant for family and friends of the contestants
 - A Missouri (or small-town) history buff's tour of Mexico

Target Market:

- Chamber officials and members
- Miss Missouri Pageant Officials
- Property Owners
- Business Owners
- Residents
- Retirees
- Cultural Tourists
- Food Tourists
- Cyclists
- Higher Income Shoppers
- Girlfriend Weekend Shoppers
- Mother/Daughter Shoppers

2. Offer simple events, like luncheons and lectures that would appeal to special groups and bring them to the city. For example, saddlebred enthusiasts could be invited for a day that would include a trip to the museum, stables and lunch with a guest lecturer from Mexico or a nearby university.
 3. Promote current festivals to these audiences. Specifically, the Prairie Pine Quilt Guild Quilt Show and the Walk Back in Time are events that could attract passionate quilters and historians, respectively. Reach out through social networks and blogs that appeal to these groups to get on events calendars and generate stories.
- **Consider new events.** In addition to small events for specialty groups, like luncheons, there are other activities that could appeal to the masses and attract a diverse range of new tourists. Playing on Mexico's name, a Cinco de Mayo celebration or Mexican Culture Celebration could attract visitors from Columbia, Fulton and beyond.
 - **Expand use of social media, and re-evaluate the city's advertising spending.** Effective management of social networks (like a Village Square Facebook page or communitywide blog) would help spread the word about tourist attractions and events. Also, as with retail, Google and Facebook ads could be effective in attracting new tourists to the region.

Strategy 5.4 - Attract more overnight visitors. While day traffic is great, Mexico's ultimate goal is to attract visitors to come and stay the night at one of the city's hotels or bed and breakfasts. Several of the tactics outlined above

for day visitors could also be applied for overnight stays. For example, in addition to drafting sample one day itineraries, the VSA can put together full weekend options. Tours for specialty groups can be expanded into two-day affairs where there is interest. People who travel to one of the city's existing festivals could be encouraged to stay the full course of the event. In addition, Mexico can make strong appeals specifically to the weekend travel crowd. Tactics to attract overnight guests:

- **Create special weekend packages.** Weekenders travel to different communities for a variety of reasons. They could be pulled by natural beauty or a unique natural event, like nesting eagles. Many head to quaint B&Bs for special food and wine weekends. Others look for a unique cultural experience like a festival. While Mexico can't be everything to everyone, it does have some unique assets for the weekend travel crowd.
 1. Create a theater package with the Presser Performing Arts Center. Encourage the center to work with local hotels to create a package that includes dinner, a show and breakfast the following morning. If possible, offer a special incentive for people who book the package, perhaps a backstage tour of the theater or a chance to meet the cast.
 2. As a slight modification, Mexico could hold "sweetheart" weekends that appeal to couples looking for a romantic getaway. This could include shopping in the quaint shops of the Village Square, bike rentals to explore Mexico's trails, a candlelit dinner followed by a play and special amenities like chocolate-covered strawberries and champagne at their hotel.

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3. Create a special weekend for horse lovers that includes a tour of the historic stables and the museum, a trail ride with a picnic lunch, a chance to meet with breeders or American Saddlebred experts and another trail ride at sunrise.
4. Take advantage of Mexico's location near Amish country, and specialty Amish furniture store, with a weekend tour. Include time for meals prepared by Amish families during the day, with a home base in Mexico for hotel stays, evening meals and plenty of time for shopping in the Village Square.
5. Gastronomic touring is on the rise. People travel great distances in search of unique food experiences, and it isn't limited to the upper class. Additionally, the quest for locally sourced food has been on the rise for years. In light of these trends, Mexico could put together a "food and farming" weekend with rich, locally sourced meals, a tour of the farmer's market and possible visits to nearby farms like Binder's Hilltop Apple and Berry Farm or W.W. County Line Farm (organic).
6. In conjunction with one of the city's current agricultural festivals, like the Audrain County 4-H & Youth Fair in July or the Audrain AgriFest in August, Mexico could hold a "rural roots" weekend that includes modern farming techniques and demonstrations from a bygone era, tours to neighboring farms and country-style meals containing ingredients from Audrain County farmers.

7. There is a continuing migration of younger generations to crafts like knitting, sewing and jewelry making. A special weekend could be put together for novice quilters and sewers to teach the craft and create fellowship with men and women who have been practicing for some time. It could include beginners classes, special technique demonstrations, opportunities to shop for materials (and finished quilts) and themed meals.
 8. The antiquing crowd travels great distances for unique finds. Special events like St. Louis' "Gypsy Caravan" even charge admission (as a fundraiser for St. Louis Symphony Orchestra) for the right to browse through mountains of eclectic antiques. A special antique weekend, or simply a "shoppers delight" promotion, could be arranged to appeal to this crowd.
- **Promote weekend getaway ideas.** Even if a coordinated weekend getaway with discounts and group activities isn't feasible, many of the ideas listed above (and others) can still be made available to tourists. The idea that Mexico can be a weekend destination needs to be seeded throughout the region and the state.
1. Reach out to local radio stations and newspapers and begin conversations with bloggers that appeal to some of the specialty groups that may be interested in a trip to Mexico. For a larger or more unique story (e.g. Mexicoans celebrate their first Cinco de Mayo), the city could reach out to regional publications like *Midwest Living* or *AAA Midwest Traveler*.

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- 2. Coordinate with the Missouri Division of Tourism. Currently, there is little listed on visitmo.com/Mexico. There is no description of the city, related articles or coupons. The only event listed is a traveling Vietnam Veterans Memorial exhibit that is crossing the state. In addition to getting more information published on the main state tourism site, Mexico representatives should provide talking points and fact sheets to the agency to better equip its staff to talk about Mexico tourism.



Examples of pamphlets and publications put out by various organizations to encourage tourism in the Mexico, Missouri, area

CONCLUSION

The City of Mexico, in particular the Village Square, has a number of assets that can be leveraged to bring increased revenue and investment. However, to do so, it is strongly recommended that the city reinforce its brand and venture further into the digital sphere, particularly with website realignment and social media.

Mexico residents need to feel invested in the future of their city and Downtown. That would be greatly enhanced with a new paid position at the VSA. Even if that is not immediately feasible, a strong board can pull together to become increasingly active as an organization and engage more members of the community.

By forming regional coalitions, syncing more closely with state agencies and being more aggressive with media outreach, the city will be able to reinforce and strengthen its reputation in the region and the state. However, to impact long-term investment in the Village Square, more communications need to be targeted directly at the business community. With strong support and cooperation from the city and the chamber, the Village Square Association can drive Mexico's Downtown to become even more attractive for both business and tourism.

Finally, Mexico could benefit greatly by using its most apparent characteristic, its name. From a business perspective, it could provide new revenue opportunities. From a public relations perspective, it could show a fun, tongue-in-cheek attitude that helps people feel the spirit of a community.

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APPENDIX

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SWOT Analysis

A SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis is a highly effective way of identifying Strengths and Weaknesses (of existing conditions) and the Opportunities and Threats (of future conditions) which may be present or emerge within any given community. Carrying out this type of analysis will assist an entity in capitalizing on its strengths and opportunities and on focusing needed attention on those areas requiring improvement.

The sponsors of the DREAM Initiative have long recognized the benefits that can be derived from a community's willingness to identify and address features, both physical and psychological, that may hinder its progress. As part of the analysis process that was conducted for Downtown Mexico, the consultants and local leaders facilitated a series of Focus Group Meetings with representative groups from the Downtown community; interviews with Downtown Mexico business owners; user surveys of area residents and out-of-town visitors; and conducted on-site visits of Downtown.

The summary of the analysis is listed on the following pages as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Downtown Mexico.

Downtown Mexico SWOT Analysis:

The DREAM Initiative has facilitated Focus Groups Meetings, business owner interviews, and on-site visits. The summary of the SWOT Analysis is listed below:

Strengths

- Concentration of civic institutions brings people to Downtown (Courthouse, City Hall, library, churches, etc.)
- Businesses which are regional shopping destinations.
- Unique retail shops.
- Smart and successful business owners.
- The Chamber of Commerce has a variety of excellent visitors' guides, brochures and marketing materials related to Downtown Mexico and the City of Mexico.
- City and county governments are located in Downtown.
- Strong leadership in municipal and local civic managers.
- Professional class interested in sustainability of Downtown.

Weaknesses

- Poor lighting at night creates negative image.
- The lack of a paid director for the Village Square Association (VSA).
- Downtown Mexico overall lacks a cohesive aesthetic identity.
- Many storefronts lack architectural character.
- Wayfinding to Downtown Mexico, from Highway 54 is non-existent.
- Amount of service and office users versus retail and restaurants.
- There are a few vacant lots which are visible, especially beyond the square.
- There is a perception of Downtown Mexico as being unsafe at night.
- Volunteer efforts are too often left to the same small number of people.

Opportunities

- Capitalize on the city's name for more special events and projects in the Downtown.
- There is a chance to create cohesive streetscape and wayfinding systems to establish a consistent look and feel for Downtown Mexico.
- Increasing the 24 hour population in Downtown Mexico.
- Continued beautification of Downtown Mexico will be a priority.
- The wayfinding and signage systems can improve.
- There can be increased community advertising and marketing opportunities.
- Downtown Mexico can build upon its existing niche shopping experience and atmosphere.
- A Facade Incentive Program can enhance the aesthetic qualities and experiences of Downtown.
- Rehabilitation and reuse of the depot buildings will be a new icon for Downtown and the City.
- Growing the Downtown organization: Village Square Association (VSA)

Threats

- Residents will continue to shop for luxury items outside the area.
- Strip mall and chain store development outside of Downtown.
- Difficulty redeveloping Downtown buildings will persist.
- Lack of capital in rehabilitation of downtown buildings.
- Concentration of low-rent housing surrounding Downtown.
- Perception of security problem.
- Property owners who neglect to maintain their properties.
- Local events and festivals not held in Downtown Mexico.
- Apathy and a general lack of volunteers to help achieve revitalization efforts.

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