

June 2, 2017

Re: Submission for IDA Downtown Achievement Awards
Organization: West End (Winnipeg) Business Improvement Zone (BIZ)
Project: Open for Business **Category:** Economic & Business Development

Project Summary

Open for Business was a project to increase awareness of the West End BIZ Zone as an ideal place for business to locate. The project was designed to provide a full picture of information on our area to help recruit new businesses to the zone. The target audience for the project is commercial brokers, new entrepreneurs, businesses that are located elsewhere and looking for a new area, and existing businesses that want to expand. The project package is supported by a television commercial, video on our website, an interactive map on our website showing available space for sale or lease, and posters creating an image of what an empty space could be home for. Lastly, this year we added as a final component, our West End Trends Report, providing further invaluable analysis of population and business trends of the West End.

Background

The West End BIZ is geographically the largest of the 16 improvement zones in Winnipeg. It is home to 1,100 businesses and organizations and approximately 38,000 residents. The proximity to the downtown helped create its dense residential base. Commercial use developed along the major transportation corridors as the area gained popularity. During the 1950's and 60's when families began moving to new suburban developments on the periphery, the West End slipped into decline. Crime became a serious problem by the 70's and many businesses chose to leave the area. However, in recent years, with the expansion of the University of Winnipeg's footprint, and combined efforts of community associations and the West End BIZ, the West End experienced steady revitalization. From 2000 to 2011 West End homes rose 361% in value, a greater increase than the Winnipeg average. Commercial properties also experienced a sharp increase in value. Crime statistics also fell significantly, and decay slowed. Despite increasing vibrancy and significant reductions in crime, the reputation and perception of the West End as an unsafe area lingered. Resident population had increased with more families, students and young professionals moving into the area, yet commercial property use remained stagnant or, in some areas, fell.

Opportunity / Need Identified

I attended a luncheon where Winnipeg real estate brokers presented on Winnipeg's market. The West End, in spite of our size, commercial corridors and large supporting residential population was not even mentioned. It was clear that we had to get on the brokers' radar to ensure they were aware of our amenities and trends, enabling them to pass that information on to their clients.

Goals & Objectives

The primary goal of *Open for Business* is to change perceptions of the West End and establish it as a more desirable commercial location. Our objectives were:

- Make our package and supporting information available and accessible to all in the market for commercial space

- Equip brokers and developers with the informational tools they need to “sell” the deal and increase the number of businesses in the West End.
- Create an attitude where business and brokers consider the West End a solid option for business location and investment.
- Change perception of the West End by showcasing the benefits

Audience

Through information gathering it became clear that real estate brokers lacked updated information about the West End. As these are often the first contact with those looking for business space, we targeted commercial real estate brokers, developers, economic development agencies and new businesses or existing businesses looking to expand.

Implementation

Extensive research was conducted to gather the compelling information on the area specific to what brokers are looking for; resident and customer demographics, location advantages, vehicle and pedestrian counts, and existing business mix, area amenities and more. We also needed to compile the projects, initiatives, programs and incentives currently underway, or planned for, in the area that may be appealing to prospective purchasers and tenants. This mass of information had to be condensed into a format that was attractive, easy to use and understand. We then distributed to brokers and agencies in the city and posted the package on line. Additionally a brokers’ breakfast to present directly to the commercial market representatives was planned.

Supporting and complementary marketing initiatives followed including: A video and television commercial aired on CTV, new business development, storefront and safety grants, a new interactive map appearing on our website which shows vacant commercial space, unique window advertisements developed for specific types of vacant space, the release of the West End Trends Report, and special attention, including media focus, to newly located businesses to the area. The total project budget was \$15,000 primarily for print and video expenses as we did as much as we could in-house to cut-costs.

Results

The *Open for Business* project is a great economic development tool for the West End area. It is significant to note that since October of 2015 when the project was first introduced, **81 new businesses have chosen to locate in the West End.** We are becoming more and more recognized as a key source of information by brokers, business and prospective entrepreneurs. Our extended video continues to draw play on social media and on our website. Website traffic increased from 6,220 visits in 2013 to 20,607 visits in 2016.

Business development, storefront improvement and safety grants provided by the BIZ have seen their budget increased and grant supported investment is up from \$37,307 in 2013 to \$97,926 in 2016 and the rate of return on grants to investment is up from 322% to 411%.

Supporting Quotes: Open for Business



“The cornerstone of good marketing is good data. The West End BIZ has done the legwork to eliminate the guesswork for those looking to invest or expand in the West End.”

- Angela Mathieson, CEO Centre-Ventre Development Corporation

“I wish other biz zones are as proactive as your group in putting together a snapshot of their community. Illustrating the strengths and positives assists us when showing clients any kind of commercial spaces in an area. Since business owners/ employers have the well-being of their employees in mind when looking at the amenities and other positive attributes.”

- Reno Augellone, Shindico Realty Inc.