Downtown Institute
Grand Junction, Colorado
August 27, 2017
Participants work on telling the story of their business, photo: Jamie Shapiro (cover photo courtesy Downtown Business Improvement District)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Downtown Grand Junction has been an active member of Downtown Colorado, Inc. (DCI) for many years, and their Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) and Downtown Development Authority (DDA) have long been district leaders in Colorado. In the Spring of 2017, the BID approached DCI to hold a Downtown Institute focused on retail, and DCI assembled a team of experts.

DCI holds two-four Downtown Institutes each year in communities throughout Colorado. For each Institute, the host community determines a focus specific to their goals and objectives, and DCI puts together a team of experts to present and work with participants. DCI then works with the community to bring together local and regional stakeholders.

On August 27th, 2017, DCI staff, volunteer consultants, downtown businesses and representatives from other communities came together in Grand Junction for the institute, held in beautiful Avalon Theatre. The institute included presentations and workshops from Brian Corrigan of Oh Heck Yeah, Elaine Brett, organizational development consultant, Pattie Snidow of USDA Rural Development, Rachel Hanson, Mesa County Libraries, and Rachel Trigano, communications consultant.

Educational sessions were held on window displays and store design, surviving in an Amazon world, and telling the story of your business. Participants had the opportunity to work on refining their own stories, and then participated in Idea Stations, dedicated to online presence, local resources, and business succession planning.

ABOUT DOWNTOWN COLORADO, INC. (DCI)

Downtown Colorado, Inc. (DCI) is a nonprofit, membership association committed to building better communities by providing assistance to Colorado downtowns, commercial districts, and town centers. Established in 1982 as Colorado Community Revitalization Association and now doing business as Downtown Colorado, Inc., our organization provides four core services to organizations and individuals engaged in downtown and commercial district development: technical assistance, education, advocacy, and program participation.

With more than 160 dues-paying, organizational members, DCI serves a diverse group of communities. Members represent downtown organizations, local governments, development and improvement districts, consultants, individuals, and others involved in downtown and community development. An organizational membership includes anyone that works for the organization, thereby greatly multiplying the number of individuals who benefit from a DCI membership. DCI members receive a wide variety of benefits including low-cost technical assistance, members-only events, discounts on educational events, scholarship opportunities, free professional referrals and phone consultations, access to online resource library, membership directory, discounts, and benefits from partner organizations, and much more.
PARTICIPANTS (BUSINESSES & COMMUNITY LEADERS)

A Couple Stitches, Embroidery
Berg Harvest Mercantile
Brown Cycles Bike Shop
Central City
City of Craig
City of Montrose
Colorado Housing and Finance Authority
Colorado Baby
Crafts and More Vendors Galore
The Craft Studio & Yarn Shop
The Depot Group
Dragonfly Gift Shoppe
Downtown Grand Junction
FACTORY
Fat Cat Pottery
Gambles Ace Hardware
Gelato Junction
Grand Junction DDA
Grand Valley Books
Old Friends Trading
Out West Books
Seasons to Follow
Starla Joy Embroidery
United Country Real Colorado Properties
Todd D. Hildebrandt Law, LLC
Town of Parachute
Willow Creek

PLANNING PARTNERS

Allison Blevins, Grand Junction BID
Elaine Brett, Business and Organizational Development Consultant
Katherine Correll, Downtown Colorado, Inc.
Brian Corrigan, Oh Heck Yeah
Rachel Hanson, Mesa County Libraries
Jamie Shapiro, Downtown Colorado, Inc.
Pattie Snidow, USDA Rural Development
Rachel Trigano, Communications Consultant
DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR MERCHANDISING AND DISPLAYS

Brian Corrigan started the day with a presentation describing a design framework and interventions that attendees can implement immediately within their stores and storefronts:

- Use **C.R.A.P.** to evaluate and improve your store design.
  - **Color** relates to fun, atmosphere, and emotion. Emotion is key to people buying things.
  - **Repetition** can be used to draw people in, and then highlight items. It helps people to remember, and places things in the front of their mind. Imagine a field of cows, all black and white, and then one purple cow (see *Purple Cow*, by Seth Godin, on business and marketing).
  - **Alignment** can pull things out of line and focus attention. Like buildings downtown, alignment creates a sense of harmony.
  - **Proximity** of where things are shapes how people imagine them. Setting a scene creates a story for people.

- Use your story as a magnet, “the why” to attract people.
  - Story is the most important part of your businesses.
  - Often, it is hard to see what is most significant about your story—the outsider can sometimes see it most clearly.
  - Let people know your mission.

- **YesPleaseMore**, the popup store in Denver cofounded by Brian Corrigan.
  - Made $250,000 in 3 months
  - Some of the profit went to funding ideas for the store—3 $500 mini grants each quarter, selected by online voting. This drove traffic online, and increased community buy-in to the store.
  - People came because of the mission. They weren’t able to tell the mission to everyone who walked in the door—so they displayed it on the front window!
  - Used trash (cardboard) for interior furniture.
  - Re-arranged interior layout every 3 months—this brought press to the store, to see what was new—marketing without spending a dollar.

- Advantages of Brick and Mortar: Connecting to people—old style in reimagined ways.
- Goal: to have fun and make money. To create an environment for creativity.
In the second part of Brian’s presentation, he spoke on a reoccurring question for many small businesses: “How can I compete in the online shopping era?” Brian spoke about the role of building a unique store experience, iterative design, and human relationships. Brian also told the story of OhHeckYeah, an interactive street arcade in downtown Denver that has toured nationally.

- The reality is that many goods are cheaper purchased online than in physical stores.
- There are many reasons for optimism. Forbes wrote Five signs that stores will do well:
  - All but 1 of the top US retailers are physical stores.
  - Amazon purchased Whole Foods.
  - Millennials and Generation Z prefer real stores.
  - Retail sales in the first quarter of 2017 increased 4.1% over first quarter 2016.
  - Interest in experiences (i.e., being downtown) continues to grow.
- How can you highlight your story, and the experience of your store?
  - Bring in an opera singer or a ballet dancer
    - YesPleaseMore had great success bringing in performance artists.
- Test Market
  - Write down the worst idea you can think of—once that is out of the way, brainstorm.
  - Try some of your wildest ideas.
  - Track the data.
  - If they don’t increase sales, stop and try something else.
  - If they do increase sales, continue and expand.
- How do you change people’s behavior?
  - It is hard to get people to try new things.
  - Plant someone to try it first—once it is tried, others will follow.
  - OhHeckYeah, an interactive street video game. When people stopped playing, friends (plants) would play, and then the public would engage.
- Partner with Local Creatives
  - Partner with others, like designers, musicians, etc. who will add value.
  - OhHeckYa had a score performed by the Colorado Symphony, and video games created by local game designers.
- Be aware of generational preferences.
- Be flexible
  - For example, an online eye-glass retailer opened physical stores that also sell books and coffee.
  - An auto parts store in Grand Junction sells a great deal of bottled water. They also custom order things for people—even though it marks up the price!
  - Listen to what your customers want.
- [www.PSFK.com](http://www.PSFK.com) for market research and insight. Could district resources be pooled for a tool like this?
IDEA STATIONS

Participants then split up and rotated around three idea stations. The stations were facilitated by Elaine Brett, organizational development consultant, Rachel Trigano, Communications Consultant, and Rachel Hanson, Mesa County libraries. The stations gave the participants a chance to brainstorm new ways to revitalize their business through stations addressing local resources, online outreach, and succession strategies.
Rachel Hanson, Mesa County Libraries, shares resources with participants

**Resources Available Through the Library**
At this station, participants learned from Rachel Hanson about the many business support resources available at the library. These include:

- High quality digital cameras (can be checked out).
- High quality video cameras (can be checked out).
- Audio recording studio.
- Access to Linda.com, with high quality online classes related to business, marketing, design, etc.
- Access to meeting rooms.
- Ability to host classes at the library, and promote your business.

**Strategy for Reaching Customers Online**
The next station, with Rachel Trignano focused on online outreach—what is the best way to engage the community and beyond online? Findings were synthesized as follows:

- Establish and work on your brand.
  - Your brand is crucial for internal operating, and for external relationships.
  - Brand then builds trust with clients and customers.
  - Know what you are good at, and what you are great at! You only need to be great at one thing.
- Mission
  - Doesn’t have to be shared. Should include: what, how, where and why.
This can then inform your brand and visual style.

- Should inform your decision making, and helps you prioritize action.

- Use social media channels based on your customers.
  - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogging. Should reinforce website and brand.

- Invest in the services of a professional to help you get a great product. See what partnerships you can make with communications / marketing / design professionals.

**Succession Strategy for the Future of the Business**

Finally, participants worked with Pattie Snidow, USDA Rural Development, to contemplate their succession strategy including the option of employee-ownership. Ideas from this station included:

- Succession planning (planning for the future of your business) should begin early.
  - Do you want to sell the business for retirement?

- Many times, small businesses don’t appropriately plan for the transition of their business.
  - For example, a veterinary office in an Eastern Plains town wanted too much money for their business, and their employee (vet) ended up leaving and starting her own practice. The situation could have been beneficial to both, but was not.

- The employee owned, coop model provides an alternative for business transition.
  - Requires at least 3 employees.
  - Original owner can retain a stake in the company.
  - Ownership can be divided any number of ways; it is recommended that ownership size be based on production—hours, value added, length of time, etc. (can be defined in the agreement).
  - Each agreement is unique to the particular needs of the business.
**Downtown Assessments and Advisory Services**
DCI offers advisory services for a variety of needs and objectives related to downtown, including stakeholder engagement and creating downtown test projects. An assessment would provide a 2-day intensive workshop, in which outside consultants would come to a series of meetings with different stakeholder groups, culminating in a community presentation and assessment report with an action item workplan.

**Business Enhancement Program**
DCI received a Rural Business Development Grant from USDA, and can bring consultants with expertise in online and digital marketing, store layout and display, and inventory management to the community.

**NEXT STEPS**
The workshop concluded with the next steps and priorities for individual businesses and the Downtown Business Community, BID and DDA going forward. These were the result of participant suggestions and best practices.

For Businesses
- Fine tune your story.
- Think about experiences and story in your store layout, design, and branding.
- Treat your businesses the same way you would treat your best customer.
- Always speak highly of downtown.
- Try Facebook Marketplace to expand your reach.
- Bring events into your business (bring artists inside, etc.).
- Expand hours into evening, weekend.
- Use the library—they will promote you.
- Check out high quality cameras and equipment from the library to enhance your social media and marketing.

For the Downtown Business Community, BID and DDA
- Always speak highly of downtown.
- Limit non-retail services (i.e. realtors, banks, etc.) from taking too much ground floor Main Street space. This could be through an ordinance, or through incentives.
- Make iconic downtown art (Dalton Trumbo in the bathtub, for example) available for purchase in miniature.
- Hold a social media class.
- Create a 5 year strategic plan for the BID.
- Make wifi available downtown.
- Promote downtown to tourists in Colorado.
- Keep up the good work!!