

Business Group

OLD TOWN BOUTIQUE DISTRICT (OTBD)

Contact

Elizabeth Todd
Owner, The Shoe Hive
libby@nextwavecommunications.org

Other Participating Organizations/Businesses

The Old Town Boutique District (OTBD) comprises of 20 independently owned, diverse retail stores located in the heart of Old Town Alexandria.

Mystique	Treat	Little Monogram Shop
Christmas Attic	Stanton Gallery	Red Barn Mercantile
Hysteria	Lawrence Miller & Co.	Apple Seed
The Shoe Hive	Bellacara	Diva
Bloomers	Full Cup	Monday's Child
La Cuisine	Gossypia	The Hour
Pink & Brown	Periwinkle	

Overall Goal/Purpose of the Project

The Old Town Boutique District began in the fall of 2007 with a small group of stores willing to “test” the idea of doing joint marketing activities. It allowed the group to reach more consumers at a fraction of the cost to do it independently. The success of those activities got the attention of other independent stores and the group grew to 19 stores by the spring of 2008. Calling ourselves the Old Town Boutique District, we sought to carry out the vision of becoming a vibrant marketing cooperative with the goal of marketing Old Town Alexandria as the premier shopping destination in the highly competitive Washington DC metropolitan area.

Last year, the Boutique District stores were granted matching funds by the City’s Marketing Committee to assist our marketing efforts and to build a website, www.oldtownboutiquedistrict.com. *Now that we have built it, it’s time to market it.* Our plan is to seek funding to hire a firm to market the website, improve search engine optimization, and create an e-mail marketing tool similar to Daily Candy, DC Scout or CityShopGirl with a strictly Old Town Alexandria focus.

The ultimate success of our efforts will both create a virtual community of Old Town shoppers that benefits all participating stores and attract new shoppers to our destination, benefiting all Old Town merchants.

Benefit to the City of Alexandria

Fortunately, the timing of the formation of the OTBD couldn't have been better. The downturn in the economy has negatively impacted our retail base and forced many stores to close their doors. In fact, the OTBD has already lost 2 stores to the economic situation and many are struggling to stay afloat. Outside of the participating Boutique District stores, there is considerable evidence of retail businesses in Old Town that have decided to close their doors.

Now more than ever, with tax bases decreasing all across the country and retail sales dropping month to month, it is vital to find ways to market the retail community in Old Town Alexandria, to attract customers to Alexandria, and to keep businesses in business. Obviously, the loss of businesses means a decrease in sales tax revenue for the City and an erosion of the Old Town core threatens to decrease property values and accompanying commercial property tax revenues. The City has a compelling interest in both preserving a critical mass of quality retail stores in Old Town and preserving Old Town's image as a unified shopping destination.

In conjunction with the City's Buy Alexandria program, which we all proudly support and display on our doors, we believe we can work together to increase traffic to Old Town, improve retail sales and, ultimately, bring more tax revenue to the City. A vibrant, walk-able retail community also adds to the value of a community and makes Old Town Alexandria an even more desirable place to live and locate offices that bring high-wage jobs to our city.

Marketing Plan

Our marketing plan comprises of many components.

Boutique District maps: We will print 5,000 updated walking maps of the Boutique District that will be distributed to customers and placed in hotel lobbies, on Potomac Riverboats, and at the Visitors' Center.

District-wide seasonal shopping events: All the stores in the OTBD will participate in four joint "shopping event" weekends with will include special offers, experiences, and/or sales in each store.

Direct mail: We will promote three of the four shopping weekends with direct mail to our combined customer lists. Each store in the OTBD will contribute its own customer list and opt-in marketing list for distribution of a professionally produced mailer featuring all participating stores.

Earned media: We will leverage the theme of each seasonal shopping event for maximum media exposure and market OTBD to regional newspapers and television outlets on key shopping dates (Black Friday, day after Christmas, etc). We will pursue coverage in national tourism and industry specific media marrying our shopping destination to Old Town's historic destination.

Web traffic: We will drive traffic to the OTBD website with a keyword optimization effort and Internet search advertising. We will seek links to our site from logical partner sites across the region and with relevant industry-specific groups (fashion, home, children, beauty, etc.)

Social networking: We will activate a social networking campaign using Facebook and Twitter to drive awareness of the existence of OTBD and build an online community using social book marking and other tools.

Email marketing: Mirroring the success of industry email list servers like DC Scout and Daily Candy, we will develop an Old Town-focused email campaign, seeking subscriptions from our own customers and providing incentives to subscribers to forward the email.

Second Thursdays: Working with the Old Town Business Professional's Association, we will help promote its Second Thursday initiative and keep our stores open late on those dates April-September.

Prime Print Advertising: *The Washington Post* publishes a quarterly magazine called *Fashion Washington* that is distributed to 98,000 prime Post subscribers and at area boutiques. We will utilize full-page ads in two of those issues, including an ad coinciding with our fall shopping weekend and a Christmas gift guide. The ads will promote the OTBD, member stores, and the website.

Project Budget

\$1,000	Map printing
\$3,000	Design of direct mail
\$18,000	Printing, letter shop, and mail three pieces of direct mail
\$2,000	Print email list serve "opt-in" cards for each store
\$550	Annual fees for hosting and domain renewal
\$3,000	Enterprise platform for OTBD email list server
\$3,450	Expand programming of store info pages of website and add RSS feed
\$17,000	Management services for email marketing plan, design of email templates, collection and development of marketing email content
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and execute a 12-month email marketing plan• Design and develop 1-2 email templates (includes wireframe and 3 design rounds for each)• Develop and execute a social media plan• Re-design home page and internal pages• Develop and execute a list-building plan for OBTD• Search engine optimization• GOOGLE search engine advertising (\$3,600)

Measurement Techniques

Mirroring our measurement techniques during 2008, the OTBD will collect sales and new customer data from our "shopping event" weekends. This data will compare OTBD marketing-driven events against comparable non-event weekends. Furthermore, because this grant is focused on web and e-mail driven communications, the success of the effort in 2009 should be gauged by visits to the OTBD website, new opt-in signups for customer lists in individual stores and the OTBD, and open rates for mass email blasts sent by the OTBD.

Estimated Cost

\$48,000

Grant Request

\$24,000

Target Audience

Our target audience is two-fold – the Alexandria community and savvy consumers across the DC metro area. The Alexandria community is obviously our main focus because of the location of our stores. Many in the Alexandria area are still unaware of our presence and/or offerings in Old Town despite the length of time some stores have been in business. Because the Washington DC metro area is such a transient community, it's important to continue to drive home the importance of shopping in your hometown and to make residents aware of the products and services that exist in their own backyard.

The Alexandria community, however, does not simply encompass Old Town residents; it also spans south and west of Old Town. These areas are particularly prime targets because of the affluence of those areas and the lack of shopping opportunities. These consumers literally need to go through Old Town Alexandria to reach other shopping destinations with similar product offerings. We'd like to capture them and keep them from going to Fairfax and Arlington malls or other shopping areas. The convenience of the retail shopping community in Alexandria makes these consumers an easy target if we can make them better aware of our offerings.

The second focus group is the savvy, brand conscious consumers across the region. These consumers are focused specifically on a brand offering, rather than a convenient shopping destination, and are willing to travel. Many of these serious shoppers are also seeking a "shopping experience" and, from the beginning, the Old Town Boutique District has sought to present our area's offerings to the region as that kind of destination – perfect for a shopping excursion that includes visits to multiple stores and restaurants.

Competitors/Plan to Differentiate

The Old Town retail community is always competing with other shopping destinations such as Clarendon, Bethesda, Georgetown, and the U Street Corridor of downtown DC. The one aspect that sets us apart from the rest is the historic nature of Old Town Alexandria as well as its proximity along the Potomac River and to other popular historical destinations.

Old Town Alexandria is unique for its quantity and quality of independently owned, diverse retail businesses and its small town charm. When we encounter new customers, we're often told how much they prefer to shop in Old Town because of the small town charm and the warmth and attention they get from shopkeepers.

We have been and will continue to market the Old Town Boutique District and Old Town Alexandria alike as a place where customer service and expert knowledge still exists. We take pride in our town and our retail community as a place where big box stores with self-service attitudes do not dominate. That difference is evident by the positive response from our customers. We will continue to market ourselves with that differentiation – preserving Alexandria’s collective advantage in the minds of the region’s shoppers.

Measurements of Success & Reporting

The OTBD will make quarterly reports to the Alexandria Marketing Fund regarding the success of our district-wide shopping event weekends and our email/web/social networking efforts.

We will gauge success by attempting to measure:

- 1) Year-over-year and weekend-over-weekend sales and new customer results for our shopping event weekends.
- 2) Open rates and opt-in counts for our email list server
- 3) Web site traffic and new links
- 4) Earned media success