# Central Business Districts: The Measures of Success

As part of the Ohio State “Central Business Districts: The Measures of Success” study, primary data was collected through twenty interviews with downtown business and government leaders (elected officials, city planners, downtown organization managers, chamber of commerce directors, and the like). First, the 500+ cities and villages mentioned in the previous section were grouped using a clustering technique. Next the city with the greatest per capita sales in each group was selected to conduct the interviews. What follows is a synopsis of these interviews, identifying proven strategies and policies for developing successful central business districts. Here is a quick list:

1. Well-developed community and government relations built on trust
2. Consistent pedestrian traffic
3. Effective downtown promotion
4. Good central business districts (CBD) have good access to good financial and educational resources
5. Reliable Communication Network
6. Active downtown business recruitment and retention
7. Transparent and flexible planning and zoning
8. Capable organizations collaborate and contribute to success
9. Physical design of the CBD is conducive to a healthy CBD
10. A strong neighborhood customer base means day-round and year-round sales
11. Conduct R&D – Rip-off and Duplicate.

## 1. Community and Government Involvement

Local business involvement in community service, community events and government builds solid communication pathways and trust between community, businesses and government. The result of increased communication and trust are more unified goals and understanding in developing the central business district. Having local business involvement means that local businesses are then part of the solution.

* Local business involvement in community service
  + Sponsoring and volunteering at community events promotes local retail and services.
  + Organizing and volunteering to clean and enhance the downtown are a way to establish a presence in the community.
* Scheduled meetings between local government and the Chamber of Commerce
  + Having an open door policy for discussing problems between local retail and services and government is very important, but some problems can be avoided all together by routinely meeting to discuss potential problems and solutions.
* Main Street or Downtown Development Committee that includes local council members
* Educational events for downtown retail employees, not just retail owners and managers
  + All downtown retail employees meet annually to receive announcements, training and learn more about the progress of downtown.
  + May be used in larger exurban communities to increase education and unity among members of the local retail and service community.

## 2. Increasing Pedestrian Traffic

Events, block parties, streetscapes and amenities can be used to help promote downtown by exposing people to what downtown has to offer. Focus on getting people downtown at different points in the day. For example, a theater and restaurants prove to increase traffic at night.

Stores need to take advantage of the exposure, especially during events, by promoting the downtown as being both a unique shopping experience and a place that can meet the community’s routine shopping needs. This can be done by handing out coupons and educating shoppers of routine promotions and services provided by the store.

* Linking downtown to nearby attractions and amenities
  + Establish transition service and public businesses between the downtown and nearby attractions and amenities
  + Provide safe/convenient walkways and bike paths.
* Improve the ambience of downtown through streetlamps, brick streets, benches, flowers and trees.
* Events (Irish festival, Art Fair, Sidewalk Sale, Victorian Christmas, Open House)
* Farmers Market
* Block Parties
* Downtown Employment
  + Service and government offices increase daily and daytime downtown traffic and increases the convenience of shopping and dining downtown.

## 3. Downtown Promotion

Utilizing local media resources on both the community and county level to advertise are a great way to promote downtown.

* Local Television
* Website
  + Linking Chamber of Commerce, local community, county and urban area websites are cost effect way of advertising to the community and drawing in customers from outside the community.
  + Developing store websites and utilizing e-business strategies is a way stores can eliminate the distance between customers in other communities and their store.
* Radio
* Brochures
  + Can be distributed at state run welcome centers and with local businesses that receive heavy traffic, such as banks.

## 4. Financial and Educational Resources

As communities evolve business owners need the resources to satisfy local regulations, expand and meet the changing demands of customers. The right combination of financial resources and business education is needed so that businesses not only have access to money to invest, but that they also know how to best invest in their business.

* Matching façade grants
* Ohio’s GrowNOW Program
* Small business education through a development center, college, university or seminar.
* Tax abatements
* Revolving loan fund provided by local financial institutions.
* Electronic grants
* Easy access to resource information and the resource utilization process
  + Providing information, forms and directions for all known resources online and at a “one stop shop” physical location.
* Hand-hold not only with the merchant, but the landlord (owner of the building)

## 5. Networking and Communication

In many communities the majority of communication between retailers themselves and retailers and residents is done informally, but having established mediums, relationships and communication networks not only increase information sharing, but provide a more efficient and inclusive way of sharing events and ideas.

* Newsletter
* Downtown or Main Street committee meeting with neighborhood and civic groups
  + More in depth customer insights and answers to specific questions may be gained by approaching pedestrian groups in the community.
* Street or block captains
  + May be used to help organize or encourage involvement of local retail and service owners, especially in larger communities.
* Member to member email
  + Idea development can be achieved more efficiently and more people can contribute by using an email list. A small idea from one store spread through an email list can turn into a downtown event by increasing knowledge and getting everyone involved.
* Local services working in collaboration with retail
  + Both sectors often feed off the same customer base. Collaborative promotion and idea development is beneficial to the success of both sectors.

## 6. Downtown Business Recruitment and Retention

Downtowns need to find the right combination of anchor service businesses, local restaurants, convenience stores and niche market stores to achieve a consistent and self sustaining central business district.

* Universal gift cards
* Mentor program for new businesses
  + helps new businesses understand their customer base and the advantages of collaborating with other downtown businesses.
* Service businesses that act as anchors for the downtown (hotel, theatre, courthouse)
* Flexible and accommodating parking
* Retailers that target a niche market within the community
* Convenience stores
* Face to face recruitment
* Encouraging successful stores to expand or finding successful stores outside of the CBD to put another store in the CVD

## 7. Zoning and Planning

Successful zoning and planning departments work in collaboration with local business owners and decision makers within government. In order to gain the support and trust of downtown business owners, it is also important for zoning and planning officials and architectural review boards to have the attitude of being as much of a well intentioned educator as being an enforcer of regulations.

* Well educated and well intentioned review board
* Building and sign requirements
* Flexible zoning
* Consistent enforcement of zoning and regulations
* Historic designation of the downtown or parts of the downtown
* Planners make decisions with local leaders instead of just handing over recommendations

## 8. Organizations

Organizations increase collaboration and provide a unified voice for retailers and other local businesses.

* Chamber with full time president and permanent staff
  + Increases consistency and reliability of the services and programs supported by the Chamber.
* Main Street/Downtown Development committee
  + A full time staff member dedicated to the revitalization of the CBD
  + Main Street Managers can be an important part in providing expertise, implementing programs and encouraging policies for the downtown, but having a committee that is organized and led by downtown business owners is also important.
* Chamber of Commerce of nearby urban area
* Development Corporation
* Basing all organizations dedicated to developing the central business district and local business in one physical location.
  + Increases collaboration between organizations
  + Ensures convenient access to all organizational resources for local businesses

## 9. Retail and Service Sector Mix and the Geographic Configuration of Businesses

* Linking downtown to nearby attractions and amenities
  + Establish transition service and public businesses between the downtown and nearby attractions and amenities
  + Provide safe/convenient walkways and bike paths.
* A combination anchor service businesses, local restaurants, convenience stores and niche market stores.

## 10. Working with Nearby Neighborhoods

Something here about how downtown groups can work with neighborhoods within walking distance to create a customer base (versus working only to attract visitors)

* Working with neighborhood groups to survey neighbors retail needs[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Establishing basic/convenience retail services for everyday shopping (versus just niche tourist stuff)

## 11. Copy good practice.

Bring people in from other successful CBDs from a sister city to pick their brain.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)