

**Best in the West Awards 2021 – A Celebration of Excellence
Award Nomination**

Entrant Name: Teri James, Executive Director

BIA Name: Downtown Langley Business Association

Title of Entry: Downtown Langley Business Association Social Media Strategy

Category: Marketing

Timeframe of Project: Ongoing

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Opportunity / Need:

In March 2020 we began to see the devastating impact that the global pandemic was going to have on the locally owned, small businesses in our DLBA. Many had been operating without an established website capable of offering online sales and few had the resources at that time to reach their customer base using social media. Our DLBA community is built of the relationships between our customers and the businesses located here, and seemingly overnight that community evaporated as businesses closed their doors and customers retreated to the safety of their homes.

We realized we needed to find a way to safely reconnect customers and businesses and to reestablish our downtown Langley community. We launched an extensive social media marketing campaign to rally our community and business owners with messages of hope and encouragement, acknowledgement of the benefits of supporting local businesses and several contests to encourage customers to choose to support local. We created and launched our Downtown Langley Ambassadors Program, inviting established local influencers to be a part of our 'support local' message, and they jumped at the opportunity.

Most importantly, we were successful in building an online community that reflected the one that was flourishing before the pandemic. A community centered around our love for downtown Langley, our appreciation of the businesses that are located here, around our message of the importance of supporting local, and around our mission statement – "To build relationships and to lead a cooperative effort in maintaining and enhancing Langley City, and to work together to create a safe, vibrant and unique environment for the benefit of everyone."

Audience:

The primary audiences for our social media channels are the citizens of Langley City and of our neighbouring communities of Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley.

Goal / Objectives:

- Create a community through our social media channels that would reflect the supportive in-person community that flourished in downtown Langley pre-pandemic.
- Use our social media channels to assist in the DLBA recovery efforts during the pandemic.
- Reach 10,000 followers on Instagram
 - Hitting this prestigious milestone would open up features only available to those with 10K+ followers, as well as draw the attention of high profile influencers.

Implementation:

In March 2020 we began to see the devastating impact that the global pandemic was going to have on our local businesses. The vast majority of businesses located within the DLBA are small and locally owned, and when they were forced to close their doors they were left scrambling to figure out how they would safely reopen. Many had been operating without an established website capable of offering online sales. Some businesses did have a social media presence, however, during the early days of the pandemic they did not have the staffing resources to stay active online. In addition to businesses being suddenly disconnected from their client base, the downtown Langley community that had grown to flourish over many years had seemingly evaporated overnight. Gone were the wandering shoppers, the families enjoying the many outdoor spaces, the

friends meeting up at a café or restaurant, the customers rushing to appointments, the window shoppers, the sidewalk catch ups – they were nowhere to be seen.

We saw an opportunity to use our voice through social media to rally our community around our BIA businesses. We launched an extensive multistage social media marketing campaign with a goal to recreate and rebuild an online community to support our downtown Langley business owners and customers.

The campaign launched in April 2020 where we laid the foundation for our online community. Highlights of this initial stage included:

- Daily Instagram videos released by DLBA Executive Director Teri James that provided reassuring words of hope and encouragement along with a consistent message that “We are all in this together.”
 - Positive feedback was received from numerous businesses and community members sharing that they tuned in every day for these messages to hear what was being said and to enable them to connect with a familiar face with a caring message.
- Posts to share *how* to support local businesses as well as the importance of supporting local.
- Release of a heartfelt video from our DLBA businesses to the community to say thank you for their love and support during this challenging time. This video also raised awareness about the importance of supporting local and was shared over 450 times.

Once the foundation was set and we had actively engaged both our businesses and our community supporters online, we recognized that we needed to expand our reach on social media. With travel advisories in place and citizens encouraged to stay in their own communities, we needed to find a way to do this safely and locally. The second stage of our social media marketing campaign was the creation and launch of our Downtown Langley Ambassador Program.

We started by reaching out to social media influencers that we had already built relationships with online to ask if they were interested in partnering to become a part of our online community to highlight downtown Langley and spread the message of the importance of supporting local businesses. The first official Downtown Langley Ambassador was @FatPantsForever who we collaborated with during our Pick Up Picnics event. This partnership was a huge success and we realized there was an opportunity to grow this into a seasonal program.

We put the call out that we were looking to partner with 5 Downtown Langley Ambassadors during the summer months. Successful applicants would receive \$200 Downtown Dollars, which are gift certificates redeemable at over 100 businesses in downtown Langley. These Downtown Dollars would go right back into our DLBA businesses, while also providing an opportunity for influencers to share a great downtown Langley experience with their followers.

We received 134 submissions for these 5 Summer Downtown Langley Ambassador positions. The quality of the applicants far exceeded our initial expectations. We quickly learned that there was an audience for this on both sides (a significant number of interested influencers and a large group of engaged followers), and by working with our Downtown Langley Ambassadors we were getting a more diverse view of downtown Langley and gaining a fresh and inspiring perspective of our community.

Within weeks we had our first 5 Downtown Langley Ambassadors on the streets of downtown Langley creating fresh content on a consistent basis featuring our restaurants, cafes, businesses, outdoor spaces and our Downtown Langley Mural Walk. The online community we were building now stretched beyond our personal messages and included the voices of these influencers as they shared their experiences in downtown Langley and shared the message of the importance of supporting local businesses.

The Downtown Langley Ambassador Program has now become a staple in our social media marketing campaign for 2021 and it is anticipated it will continue in future years. Here are a few of the highlights of the program:

- Significant number of applications for each seasonal ambassador program. This shows that influencers want to be a part of what we are promoting in downtown Langley. While only 5 positions are offered with each program, we have received an increasing amount of applications with each season:
 - Summer Program: 134 Applications
 - Fall Program: 278 Applications
 - Winter Program: 294 Applications
 - Spring Program: Pending launch, but we anticipate well over 300 Applications.
- Seasonal program enables us to increase the number of influencers we work with, and hand pick individuals who align well with our focus each season.
- The initial partnership with @FatPantsForver has developed into a permanent role as our Downtown Langley Foodie Ambassador. We continue to see the positive impact as a result of this engagement with the local foodie community.
- As seasonal roles come to an end, influencers are asked if they would like to stay on our contact list to be included in future communications around exclusive announcements, DLBA events and campaigns. To date every alumni influencer has agreed to staying on our contact list for future opportunities.
- To date, the Downtown Langley Ambassadors we have partnered with have a combined reach of over 63,000 followers, which has significantly impacted the reach of our own social media accounts.

Our Downtown Langley Ambassadors were now creating the personalized content needed to continue to grow the downtown Langley community online, which provided the opportunity for our DLBA Social Media Manager to turn her attention to engaging high profile influencers such as @HelloBC. She was successful in getting our Downtown Langley Mural Walk highlighted on the @HelloBC Instagram account, which has over 565,000 followers. She was also successful in executing a variety of contests using our social media accounts. By giving away a combination of business provided products and services, as well as over \$10,000 Downtown Dollars, these contests were successful in both increasing our social media reach and building our online community.

For example, we ran our 'Downtown Langley Dream Giveaway' contest for one week in May 2020. We used our Instagram account to give away a prize worth over \$3500 in donated items from 22 businesses. From this one week contest we achieved:

- Increase of 1,453 Instagram followers
- 2053 likes on our posts
- 11,109 comments/entries on our posts
- 818 shares
- 57 saves

From the launch of our social media marketing campaign to date we have exceeded all of our objectives. Most importantly, we were successful in building an online community that reflected the one that was flourishing before the pandemic. A community centered around our love for downtown Langley, our appreciation of the businesses that are located here, around our message of the importance of supporting local, and around our mission statement – “To build relationships and to lead a cooperative effort in maintaining and enhancing Langley City, and to work together to create a safe, vibrant and unique environment for the benefit of everyone.”

Results:

- Impressive social media growth during 2020 (all stats are current at the time of this nomination):

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Instagram Followers increased by 260% in 2020: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ FOLLOWS beginning of 2020: 4,111 ○ FOLLOWS now: 10,690 ○ Overall growth: 6,579 	Additional Instagram statistics: Average Daily Growth 11% Average Monthly Growth 71% Average Comments 49
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- **Facebook Followers increased by 194% in 2020:**
 - FOLLOWS beginning of 2020: 3,392
 - FOLLOWS now: 6,610
 - **Overall growth: 3,218**

Facebook likes increased by 170% in 2020:
 LIKES beginning of 2020: 3,356
 LIKES now: 5,711
Overall growth: 2,355

- Hitting the prestigious milestone of 10,000 followers on Instagram opens up app features only available to accounts with 10K+ followers and helps to draw the attention of high-profile influencers.
- Our hashtag #DiscoverDowntownLangley was used over 12,000 times in 2020

Testimonials from business owners with the DLBA:

“The DLBA’s social media is amazing! As a small business owner in downtown Langley, our social media reach is smaller than a lot of other, larger businesses, but with the help of the DLBA’s social media posts and contests, our followers have increased tremendously. In addition, the posts are engaging and fun. They do a great job representing the businesses in the downtown”.

Jina Nam, owner of Olivo Pasta

From the day I opened my doors, the DLBA team was there for me with social media posts highlighting my business. They have creative giveaways, and they work with other social media influencers to make the posts interesting and relevant. This has been very positive for my business”.

Cindia Correia, owner of The Creative Bookworm

We are now in our second location in downtown Langley, and with the help of the DLBA social media, people knew where to find us in our new location. Their contests and interesting posts involve many businesses including ours, and this has helped my business grow over the years. I appreciate this very much”.

Dal Houang, owner Dal’s Poke

Testimonials from our Downtown Langley Ambassadors:

“I enjoy the downtown Langley ambassador program so much! It really brings the community closer and makes you feel like part of a supportive family! I’ve learned so much about the area, that I didn’t know I didn’t know about. I have found some great gems that I didn’t know about as well as other places I still need to check out. There is so much to do in downtown Langley and discover downtown Langley does such a great job showcasing the businesses, and the fun things to do and see while you are there. I love spreading the word on all of these things. And especially enjoy when others message me that they are excited to try something new I posted that they didn’t know was there. Thank you!”

Kathy Johnson, Downtown Langley Ambassador

“Discover Downtown Langley has given us ambassadors a great experience. They are very positive, uplifting, and supportive. They realize that by being our greatest cheerleaders, they enable and inspire us to go the extra mile to help showcase Downtown Langley’s local businesses!”

Nate Dickson, Downtown Langley Ambassador

Project Costs:

Social Media Materials	\$11,977 (inc. ambassadors, photography, videos and @FatPantsForever)
Downtown Dollars	<u>\$10,300</u>
	\$22,277