

A Plan to Implement a Think Local First Carrboro Campaign

August 28, 2014

The Town of Carrboro and its citizens, by its nature, are supportive of its local business community. The purpose of this plan is to further strengthen the local economic, environmental, and social benefits of having a robust Local Living Economy. The Board of Aldermen first adopted the Local Living Economy Task Force recommendations in 2008. Many of the recommendations in that report have been implemented (see attachment 1) and the Economic Sustainability Commission has been tasked with updating the report. After the adoption of the report in 2008, A Carrboro BALLE Chapter was formed under the name of Localmotive. While this effort made great strides in promoting local values and was recognized across the state, the organization was not sustainable and eventually faded out. This revived effort will provide a new platform for local businesses to organize and promote buying locally.

The Board of Aldermen appointed a Think Local First Carrboro Think Tank (TLFCTT) to develop a “brand” and new marketing strategy for FY 14-15. This group of local business owners met between July 15, 2014 through August 19, 2014. The group used the BALLE Think Local First Handbook as a guide for developing the campaign.

After several meetings, the group realized the foundation for any successful local movement relied on local businesses banding together in a coordinated effort. As such, the group has been working to expand its ranks with other local businesses and launch a comprehensive campaign to educate, engage, and excite others about Carrboro’s business environment. The following report details the group’s progress and recommendations to continue enhancing Carrboro’s local business community.

GOALS

- Create a sustainable Business Networking Group (Carrboro Business Alliance)
- Plan a several events that are sponsored by CBA in a manner sustainable to the future
- Strengthen bonds between local businesses in Carrboro
- Increase local consumer awareness of the need to act locally and about the CBA
- Stimulate Business Activity
- Increase Opportunities for Creative Entrepreneurship
- Build Social Capital

These goals are focused around the group’s efforts to build a long-term sustainable network of businesses in Carrboro. This network can help spur local business by working together to promote one another and specific events in the town.

To help gauge the success of the group, we have come up with a series of metrics by which to measure our efforts.

METRICS

- Number of businesses who attend initial sequence of CBA events
- Number of people that show up at the town’s kick-off event

- Survey measuring consumer awareness before and after the campaign
- Measure retail sales before and after the campaign
- Sample survey of the business experience before and after
- Average attendance at monthly CBA meetings
- Carrboro Events email newsletter subscriber count

REACHING THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Broadly, the campaign has two targets: Carrboro businesses and consumers.

The initial target audience, local businesses, will be the backbone of the effort. The group realizes it's essential to recruit and retain a diverse set of businesses in Carrboro to show the breadth of support for the organization and its efforts. To reach local businesses, the group is leveraging its own contacts and making personal contacts with others who are perceived to be likely interested in the campaign and its efforts. The compelling arguments to these businesses will be that it helps their own business and also boosts the standard of living which directly aids in recruiting efforts. The hope is to obtain a network effect where businesses start to experience the real benefits associated with the network and continue telling others about it to grow the group's numbers.

In the end, it's our belief that the initial recruitment of businesses will be easier to do than the perpetual retention, which reinforces the importance of quickly and continually demonstrating the value of the network to new businesses. By demonstrating material benefits to businesses, they will be our best marketers in reaching new potential members through invitations to future meetings and events.

The second target of the campaign is consumers of Carrboro products and services. This group is only second in the sense that they can only truly be cultivated after building a sustainable cadre of businesses working to forward the goals and initiatives related to the area. The consumers targeted in this effort will have a real impact on the town by spending more time and money downtown and in Carrboro businesses. The group identified all Carrboro residents, both downtowners and non-downtowners; there was a special emphasis put on reaching out to the outlying newer neighborhoods. Additionally, the group realized the importance and value of reaching out to visitors, both regional day trippers and overnight stays at the new hotel. The group's belief is that if consumers see a cohesive business community and are reminded of the importance of shopping locally, they will be much more likely to spend money with a local vendor.

Key messages for the consumer campaign should not only be to buy locally, but emphasize the experience of being in Carrboro. The messages need to communicate Carrboro's commitment to quality goods, uniqueness of its offerings, and sense of community building that happens when people act locally. The message should make the consumer aware of spending habits and the far reaching impacts they have on creating a supportive "village" style economic eco-system. Some initial ideas stemming from the campaign include:

- Milled in Carrboro
- Experience Carrboro

- Support the Village
- Uniquely Carrboro

Each of these messages works to express the uniqueness of Carrboro and the high quality experience associated with the town and its businesses.

A YEAR OF PROMOTION

The group believes that the goals above are attainable through a year of promotion, targeting the groups outlined. The TLFACT discussed that opportunities to introduce the campaign to targeted audiences are largely through local events, which was the genesis for the idea of forming the CBA to help make sure these events actually happen. The Town has been very active in coordinating with local businesses and organizations to better facilitate events over the past several years. Event networking and taking advantage of the large number of people who show up for weekly activities i.e. Carrboro Farmer's Market, and annual events, like the Carrboro Music Fest were identified as the best way to spread the Think Local First message.

To help build on these events and focus the campaign around the idea of Carrboro being an active place, there will be an email newsletter started to promote upcoming weekly events for the town. The newsletter will be straightforward and extremely easy to sign up for online, and it will help engage existing residents and draw in folks who wouldn't necessarily think to visit Carrboro on a weekend. Signing up to receive the weekly email will be an important Call to Action of the campaign and can be focused on different media ranging from bus wraps to online ads.

In addition to existing events, several signature promotional events would be created throughout the year to meet campaign goals. The initial event will be a Kick-off event, will be in October 15, 2014 and will feature a free to the public showing of the independently made movie "Real Value" by Jesse Borkowski, a Carrboro Movie Producer. In addition to showing Real Value, the Town has undertaken updating a video that was originally independently produced in 2005, known as "It's Carrboro." Approaching its 10th year, this video will be used as a promotional piece for the Town. The Community will be invited to come and picnic and enjoy the movie. The Think Local First Carrboro campaign will be launched at the kick-off event.

The second promotional event will be during the months of November and December and is a holiday seasonal event on Small Business Saturday, which will encourage holiday shoppers to spend money in Carrboro during the holiday season with some coordinated shopping advantage among the merchants. There will be promotional opportunities at other holiday events like the holiday parade and tree lighting. Carrboro business promotion will continue through the month of February, with what has now become an annual event, For the Love of Carrboro. During this month businesses are encouraged to run specials and promotions which are featured on a For the Love of Carrboro website and Facebook page and in radio commercials on WCHL.

Since the events are ultimately based around the idea of a cohesive business community working to lift up the group, we also felt that it would be important to help businesses identify themselves as

supporters of the movement. Stickers for business windows will be designed in line with the messaging and logo of the new effort; businesses can hang these to show their support for the area and also to reinforce to shoppers that they're doing business with someone who supports Carrboro.

In addition to the broader ideas of the business alliance, event organization, email campaign, and window advertisements, the group has also discussed a number of other tactics to get in front of more local business owners. Those ideas include a young professional happy hour, a business pub crawl, a tumblr tracking the uniqueness of Carrboro through images, an app to help guide people around the town, handouts, posters and more.

The fledgling CBA is currently planning its first event. The event is planned for October 2nd from 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. and will be held and the soon to be opened B-Side Lounge in Carr Mill Mall. Businesses will be invited for a happy hour event, they will be asked to sign in and handed a “5 things you need to know about the CBA” card when they come in, there will be wall hangings of the creative for the campaign and a screen showing what the sign-up website will look like. There will not be a formal presentation.

CONCLUSION

The recommendation of the TLFACT is to organize a Carrboro Business Alliance made up of local business owners who share information for events and promotions. This entity will be autonomous and run by the local businesses, but have a clear goal to build a stronger community and increase the economic well-being of Carrboro. Participating businesses, will be closely included in the group's decision making process, be given the window stickers identifying them as locally owned businesses, and help cross-promote other businesses in the area. A direct goal of this new organization will be to coordinate local events to help all Carrboro businesses; these events can range from large scale productions like the Carrboro Music Festival to small happenings like handing out lemonade on the block of 300 E. Main. The idea is for businesses to have a unified front that then makes them more effective at drawing in consumers from the surrounding area. This type of organization is needed to sustain Carrboro business promotions and encourage local sourcing among the business community, and it is the belief of this organization that the group will have a strong, positive effect on the town's businesses and culture.

This report was prepared by the Think Local First Think Tank. Thank you to the following members who participated in this project.

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