

3. BID Shadow Board – Thursday 9th February 2017

‘Development of events to attract footfall and spend’

Briefing

Background

The BID business plan that went to ballot in November 2012 focused heavily on events to attract footfall into the city centre. This formed one of the four pillars of the plan, particularly looking to attract more ABC1 visitors, while developing new periods of the year away from the traditional retail peaks. The original plan concentrated on to main pillar events.

As the plan unfolded, were able to secure Vogue’s Night Out for the BID area, and started to develop a summer festival (which became ‘Dig the City’). As time moved on, we evolved the plan into two major events and one more minor one (Dig the City and Chinese New Year on the one hand and the Autumn student night on the other).

While Dig generated a lot of press, it was always difficult for retailers to get agreement from Head Offices to deliver marketing support, and the direct impact on retail sales was limited. In addition, by putting all of the limited resources of the company into two major events, we were at risk of leaving large swathes of the BID area without events and extra footfall drivers.

Therefore we evolved an event strategy that:

- 1) Provided activity in all of the BID area over the year’s programme
- 2) Provided activity aimed at a wide range of demographics to encompass as many retailers as possible
- 3) Provided activity that was as much about increasing dwell time in the city as raw numbers
- 4) Tried to balance activity that was directly aimed at increasing sales and numbers (Student Night) with that designed to increase the profile of the city centre (Chinese New Year).
- 5) Enabled CityCo to deliver within current resources.
- 6) Was aware of the continuing activity provided by the city council—the Christmas markets, Manchester Day, Manchester Games and the minor events such as the Irish Festival.

This strategy has been operating for the past two years.

Current Strategy

We now deliver two major events (Chinese New Year and Halloween (begun in 2016) and a number of smaller ones.

Chinese New Year

- Pros—huge press coverage and attention for the city centre; builds on an already successful event (CNY in Chinatown); multiple partnerships; links to crucial international audience for spend.
- Cons—always threatened by terrible weather; huge resource required; limited impact on footfall compared to the Chinatown event; lots of politics

Student Night

- Pros—excellent turnout; direct impact on sales and footfall; close partnership with Manchester Arndale; limited resource to produce; not weather dependent; generates international (student) spend.
- Cons—limited to area around MA; Autumn much better than spring; street activation can detract from impact on stores (so purely 'sales-focused'); more needed instore to attract students; only for very local audience—no opportunity for marketing the city

King Street Festival

- Pros—high end, focused on King Street and immediate area; excellent branding; good links with F&B; offers other opportunities—guidebook, tours, etc.
- Cons—only focuses on King Street! Only for local audience; High end implies quality which needs budget

Summer Festival

- Pros—fills a major gap in the calendar; usually good weather; excellent impact on Food & Beverage; good for family audience; can link to other festivals—Jazz, Children's Lit; covers most of BID; weather *should* be good.
- Cons—never quite got content right; less impact on retail; dispersed across area; only for local audience; weather dependent

Halloween

- Pros—major (and developing) retail period; focused on Market Street and around MA (though this will change in 2017); good sponsorship potential; huge enthusiasm from retailers, venues and partners; happens in half-term—so city busy anyway; no other city is doing this! National coverage.
- Cons--difficult to make a major impact on Market Street—needs a big draw on the streets; getting balance between adults and children not easy.

This strategy has been broadly endorsed by the retailers who currently pay into the BID. More than 70% of respondents to the 2016 survey were highly supportive of the events strategy and the move to more events, more often.

Future Scenarios:

1. Stay the same, with small changes.

Continue to develop the summer festival, put more resources into Halloween—making sure it spreads across the BID area. Grow the King Street Festival to encompass more food and beverage as well as retail.

2. Change some of the events

Develop new events—

- a specific food/restaurant festival that celebrates the restaurants and bars in the area

- An art event (either alone or working with something like Buy Art) that encourages visitors to see art within shops---encouraging increased footfall and discovery
- Student Night is now the only fashion event we have—is there room for something more high-end?
- Golden Week—from the beginning of October, Chinese have seven days of holidays, state-sanctioned. We know this is a time when Chinese families will visit students in the city. Rather than CNY, this might be an opportunity to develop offers, tours, special events, aimed at this particular audience.
- Graduation Weeks—the student nights work well for arriving students. But we do little to celebrate graduation when the city’s hotels are full. Is there something specific we can do in this period in late June? Or is everyone benefitting anyway?
- Ramadan—increasing emphasis for MM on spend from the gulf. How could we reflect/support this?

Put more into events generated elsewhere:

- Rather than delivering our own CNY activity, work with Chinatown to route the parade through the city centre, and focus on marketing what already exists. Work with MIF (always difficult!), the Jazz Festival, the Food and Drink Festival, etc.
3. Concentrate on one or two major events
 - Return to the original strategy and look at just one or two really big events in the year.
 4. Do smaller events more often.
 - Or go the other way and look at eight or ten events, smaller in scale, but covering just weekends.
 5. Giving up on events entirely!

Decisions for the Shadow Board:

We’re not intending to write a whole new events strategy at this board (or even for the final business plan). However, we need a sense of where /how to develop.

- Is the current strategy broadly working? If not, why not?
- Do we continue to develop our own activity, or piggyback on that of others’?
- What are the audiences and/or sectors that are not being reached? What are we missing?
- Should we return to a smaller number of bigger events? Or go the other way and look to more, smaller, events (more weekends perhaps?)
- Are there new events ideas we should look at? Art? Food?