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March 2017 Shadow Board Marketing and PR Briefing

Background

Marketing the city centre was one of the fundamental reasons for the creation of the first BID. The BID ballot campaign began just after the 2011 riots. We were aware of the challenge from Liverpool One (and the likely impending challenge from Leeds Trinity). We were also aware of the transport works - bus lanes and especially Metrolink second city crossing (2CC) - that would cut straight through the area and provide a strong disincentive for customers to come into the city centre. We were also aware that the marketing of the city centre as an entity fell between different agencies and required specific work. The BID consultation process of late 2016 re-iterated the importance of the marketing of the city centre as one of the main needs for the next version of the BID.

The initial board took a broad view of the attractions of the city centre. Our first step was to produce the 'Where to Go: Manchester' guide, a high-quality guidebook that promoted retail alongside F&B and cultural attractions. It was based on the idea that what brings people to a city centre is the entirety of its offer, not simply retail on its own. Alongside we used the Hosting scheme to supplement the 'welcome' to the city and ensure visitors had a friendly point of call for moving around the city centre. And, of course, we provided PR to support and accompany our event programme.

The view was taken that we needed to concentrate on supporting the regional audience, particularly in light of the 2CC works. We needed people to keep coming into the city centre during the works period. The major investment has been in working with Marketing Manchester (MM) on their seasonal campaigns - mainly Christmas, but also Spring and Summer. By investing with MM, we have had access to their work across the board, especially their developing work with overseas audiences.

The board asked us to investigate digital solutions (apps and mobile sites), and we employed consultants to work with us looking at solutions from other cities. At that point (2014), we came to the conclusion that getting buy-in from retailers would be difficult, and that the cost of deploying a solution would not be justified.

Main priorities have been:

- 1) Supporting increasing footfall in the city centre
- 2) Supporting ABC1 audience
- 3) Continually help raise the profile of the city by generating PR coverage of events
- 4) Ensuring the message of 'the city centre is open' continues to be broadcast

Working with overseas audiences has also become increasingly important over the past two-three years

Current Strategy

We continue to support the seasonal campaigns. 2016 saw investment through MM into spring and summer campaigns, broadly focused on the events that we have been developing. We also support the Christmas campaign, which also receives funding from Manchester city council and other partners

By working with MM, we also access work in China, the Middle East and the US as new routes open from the airport. We have been included in successive tax-free shopping guides, and are key to the press trips that MM provide to journalists.

While the role of the Hosts has expanded substantially (in terms of being operational eyes and ears and the main point of contact between BID admin and individual retailers), they remain fundamental to marketing the city centre. As the number of foreign visitors increases, Hosts are often the first point of call for visitors trying to find their way around (and providing a feeling of safety in the centre).

We continue to support the event strategy through targeted PR. For example, both the Chinese New Year and the Halloween campaigns attracted national and international coverage across all media, and do effective work at keeping the city centre in the minds of anyone looking at day or short-trips.

In more general marketing, we are re-visiting the 'Where to Go' guides with a Guide to Historic Manchester in 2017, aimed at promoting the King St/St Ann's area.

Future Areas of work:

With the transport works now at an end, the original strategy of reaching out to regional customers may not be quite so pressing. There is therefore the opportunity to look again at where and how the city centre is being promoted. These scenarios are not, of course, meant to be mutually exclusive.

1. Stay the same.

Focus on regional and local audiences through seasonal campaigns, working with MM and MCC. Continue to work to attract event audiences (for our own events and for those such as the Xmas markets). Use the Hosts to orientate visitors once they are here.

2. Look further afield

Now we are confident that people can more easily get into the city centre, work with MM to promote the city centre more widely nationally and internationally. Launch specific campaigns aimed at audiences from overseas.

3. Develop more general PR for the city centre

We have focused on PR for our events, but there remains a gap in overall promotion of the city centre. Do we need to help take a lead on this?

4. Develop new products

Investigate new areas - more guidebooks, digital, networks to promote the offer

Decisions for the Shadow Board:

As with the events meeting, this is not about writing a new marketing strategy, but giving us a sense of direction to explore further.

- Do the shadow board feel that supporting the seasonal campaigns (specifically Christmas) is still of value?
- Is there value in working more on national audiences? International?
- Are there other elements that we should be looking to include?
- Can the Host role be changed/expanded?