

# Municipal World

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## FUTURE HERITAGE

*Investments in  
built culture that  
are meant to last*



The Waterloo Region Museum, designed by Moriyaná + Teshima Architects in association with the WalterFedy Partnership, is the first LEED certified (Silver) museum in Canada. The project has been recognized with the Green Building Wood Design Award, the City of Kitchener Urban Design Award, and the Ontario Association of Architects Design Excellence Award.

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# Talking Sign Basics

## How They Work

Your audio message is recorded onto a CD or MP3 player. The player device is plugged into the transmitter and the transmitter broadcasts your message. Signage instructs visitors to tune their radio dial to the correct FM frequency. Messages can vary in length from 30 seconds or longer. Special sound effects, music, or character voices can be integrated into the presentation for marketing effectiveness. FM transmitters broadcast your message 24 hours a day and can operate from a business site or vehicle.

## Customer Benefits

Customers hear the messages through their vehicle FM radio. Visitors receive a warm and friendly voice welcome to your community. Listeners keep informed about upcoming events, current promotions, and services available. Customers can avoid having to read brochures and sign boards.

## Chamber of Commerce Benefits

Transmitters are low cost to purchase and economical to operate, although government licences are required. Communities can broadcast 24/7 in a continuous, automated audio loop. FM transmitters are not effected by weather conditions and temperature. Messages can be changed for after-hours, weekends, and holidays (or even seasonally) to provide appropriate current information. FM transmitters may be used to talk to large groups indoors or outdoors. Transmitters are excellent for outdoor rallies and festivals, and for speaking to groups in motorcades. Transmitters are very portable and easy to operate.

are all challenging the budgets of local chambers and municipalities.

## New Alternatives

There are other options though. Even the smallest budgets could collectively place inexpensive shop and store window signage in chamber members' windows to advise tourists to stay longer in their community. This signage could highlight a short-range, non-commercial tourism radio station frequency, a website, and a local or toll-free telephone number for more local tourism audio announcements. Voice-over-Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology allows the creation of inexpensive, cloud-based telephony systems that do not require call centre staff. Callers can listen to up to 10 or 15 minutes of audio announcements on a simple VoIP system. This system can receive thousands of callers simultaneously, without callers getting a busy signal or waiting in a call centre queue for a live customer service agent.

Instead of tourism associations targeting far-off audiences to attract vacation spending in their community, more at-

tention should be allocated to audiences by-passing these communities every day as they commute to and from their jobs. Their spouses and family would love to visit your community events for festivals, fairs, and weekend events, and they can be drawn into visiting your community by regional spending on billboards targeting commuters from your own region and the nearby city.

Even the town water tower or existing highway marquee signage can be untapped assets to alert motorists of the information hotline, website, and tourism radio frequency. As motorists travel past your community whether on the daily commute or during a once in a lifetime visit to Canada – you have a second opportunity to invite tourists to visit your town on their return trip coming back from their original tourism destination. Using regional signage and billboards along nearby highways combined with a non-commercial, short-range radio station for tourism information, communities can attract more tourism.

To operate such a radio station in Canada, an organization needs to get

licences from both Industry Canada and Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Council (the Federal Communications Commission in the U.S.). These approvals are very easy to get, especially in rural areas where radio frequencies are not congested. In both countries, there are exemptions for small micro-watt transmitters for the real estate industry, and special occasion permits for events such as annual festivals. "Talking Signs" are miniature radio stations (FM or AM transmitters) that broadcast pre-recorded messages from a vehicle, storefront, tourist attraction, or real estate property. The technology allows broadcasting of your tourism audio message 24-7-365 to provide information to visitors, customers, and other passers-by. Low-power, short-range stations of 50 watts power can broadcast up to a 20 kilometre radius and cost under \$10,000. Licence-free micro FM transmitters are under \$1,000.

In his book *Your Town*, Roger Brooks, a well-known and respected tourism industry consultant, shares 25 rules for successful tourism promotion and destination development. His third rule is directly related to highway billboards:

"Put your bait out on the highway – the rule of billboards and exits. People travelling at highway speeds have approximately four seconds to read your message."

That is exactly why highway billboards combined with a short-range radio frequency can be an effective tourism draw into your community.

## Conclusion

Marketing a community is a cooperative activity. The highway expressway by-passing your community can be the down fall or salvation for your local business tourism operators. Historic downtown main streets are no longer the route of choice by commuters or tourists, but they can be the drawing card to lure tourism traffic back and increase spending into your community. Pictures say a thousand words; billboards with radio announcements and short-range radio "sound" can help translate those words into tourism dollars for the community. **MW**