Peoria

Best Practices for Promoting Local Business

June 2022

zencity

Executive Summary

- Compared to the cohort average, users engaged more positively, yet slightly less actively with Peoria's messaging about local businesses.

- When it comes to best practices, posting from pages dedicated to promoting cities' downtowns generate the most discourse about local businesses. However, posts in private resident groups highlighting businesses gain the most traction per post.*

- Posts featuring videos showcasing the downtown can be exceptionally popular. Some Zencities utilize Tik Tok and Facebook Live to create creative promotional content for the shopping district. Others use contests such as scavenger hunts and social media giveaways to attract visitors.

- Leveraging national holidays– such as International Women's Day, National Small Business Week, Easter, and Mother's Day– may be key in re-engaging residents with local businesses after the Holiday season.

Introduction

Since the onset of the pandemic, residents and City officials alike have shared concern for the prosperity of local businesses. Cities have taken an increasingly active role in supporting their business districts and investing in small business owners. In order to assist in these efforts, Zencity has leveraged thousands of data points to develop best practices aimed to answer the fundamental question: **Which strategies are most effective at generating interest in local businesses?**

Using the total number of interactions (including 'likes', 'shares', emoji reactions, and comments) as a metric for success, we hope to assist the city of Peoria craft the most effective messaging to support local business development.

Included in this report is data collected across Zencity partners between December 1, 2021-June 30, 2022. The comparison group is comprised of eleven selected Zencities with 100-120K residents (Vacaville, CA; Tuscaloosa, AL; Retention, WA; Norwalk, CA; Lewisville, TX; Jurupa Valley, CA; Pompano Beach, FL; Westminster, CO; Carlsbad, CA; Lansing, MI; Sugar Land, TX). In this report, we examine and benchmark the performance of Peoria's local business communications against the cohort, and highlight four successful messaging and programmatic strategies.

Methodology

- The report offers an analysis of data collected from social media and local news outlets. As such, it reflects the interest expressed by residents using these platforms. The analysis does not include sentiment and opinions expressed on private social media discussion boards and groups,* only those expressed in fully public forums.

- The Zencity interaction count consists of all social media engagements (posts, tweets, likes, comments, shares, retweets, etc.). Therefore, the number of interactions reflects the volume of discourse and the level of interest among residents expressing their views online.

Data from private resident groups can be connected to the Zencity dashboard only through the active consent of the group administrators. Several clients included in the comparison cohort completed this process. Please contact your Customer Success Manager for more information.

Benchmarking

Before delving into specific messaging strategies, we conducted a comparative analysis of online engagement with local business promotional messaging across 10 similar US Zencities to better understand Peoria's relative standing. This section is limited to posts from May and June 2022 (in accordance with the onset of Peoria's Zencity partnership):
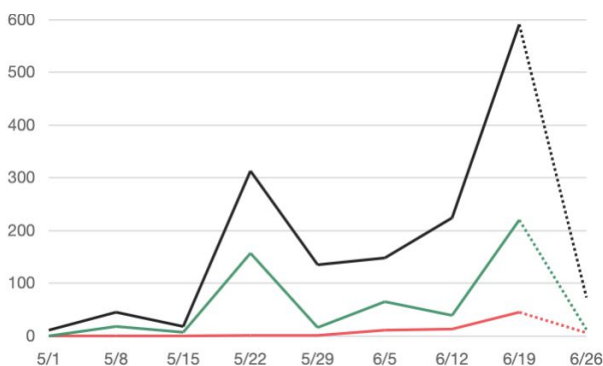
LOCAL BUSINESS PROMOTION
Discourse and Sentiment Comparison
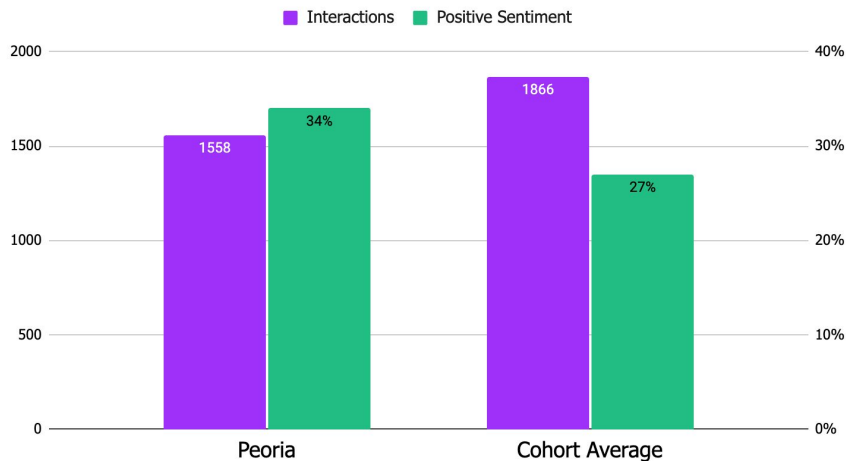
■ Interactions ■ Positive Sentiment

	Peoria	Cohort Average
Interactions	1558	1866
Positive Sentiment	34%	27%

Compared to the cohort average, users engaged more positively, yet slightly less actively with Peoria's messaging about local businesses. The volume of interactions on this topic was 16.5% lower and positive sentiment was 26% higher in Peoria than in the cohort average.

Peoria Discourse Overview

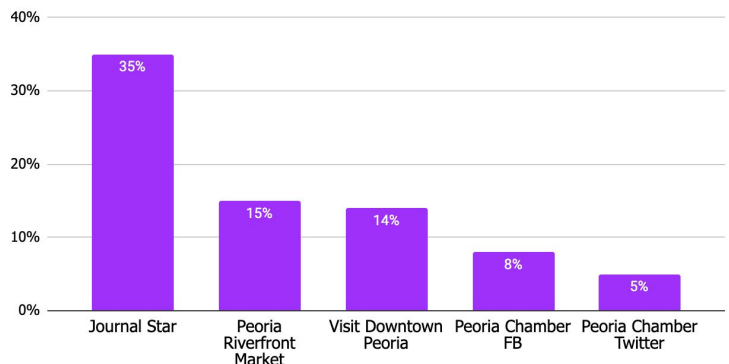### LOCAL BUSINESS PROMOTION: VOLUME TREND

Throughout the past two months, Journal Star newspaper emerged **as the most influential source in local business discourse**, prompting 35% of the interactions. The Peoria Riverfront Market elicited 15% of the interactions. The Visit Downtown Peoria Facebook page, alongside Chamber of Commerce pages, together prompted 27% of the interactions.

Online conversations about local businesses promotion in Peoria peaked twice since the start of May. Peaks were prompted by the **seasonal opening of the Peoria Riverfront Market** and a Journal Star post about **changes to the Evergreen Square shopping center.**

We note that, more broadly, negative sentiment in local economy discourse peaked in June due to news postings about Caterpillar headquarters' exit from Peoria and the impact of inflation on local businesses.

SOURCE BREAKDOWN

|	%
Journal Star	35%
Peoria Riverfront Market	15%
Visit Downtown Peoria	14%
Peoria Chamber FB	8%
Peoria Chamber Twitter	5%

Best Practices

This section analyzes the top 30 local business promotional posts published by the cohort in the past six months (December 1, 2021 - May 31, 2022) resulting in the following main best practices:

1. Utilize various channels, including resident groups and local news outlets

Below is a breakdown of aggregated data per post, by the channel on which it was published:

CHANNEL BREAKDOWN
Discourse Volume and Interactions/ Post
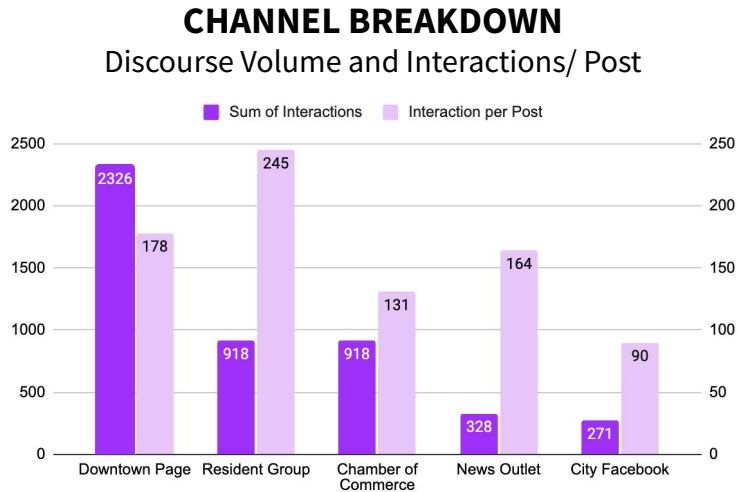
- Overall, pages dedicated to promoting cities' downtowns generated the most discourse about local businesses, followed by resident groups and official Chamber of Commerce pages.

- However, **posts in private resident groups highlighting local businesses were the most effective in engaging residents.** Such posts gained 245 interactions per post, which is 38% higher than posts on Downtown promotional pages. In some cases, **city officials themselves utilized private resident groups** in order to share information for local business events or find vendors.

- In addition, while news outlets posted about small businesses less often, these posts garnered significant attention online (164 interactions per post). News outlets emerged as the third-most effective platform for promoting local businesses. As such, **partnering with nearby media outlets to support small businesses may be an underutilized strategy** for generating interest in small businesses. For example, a recent post by the Journal Star highlighting changes to the Evergreen Square shopping center gained notable traction online (422 interactions):
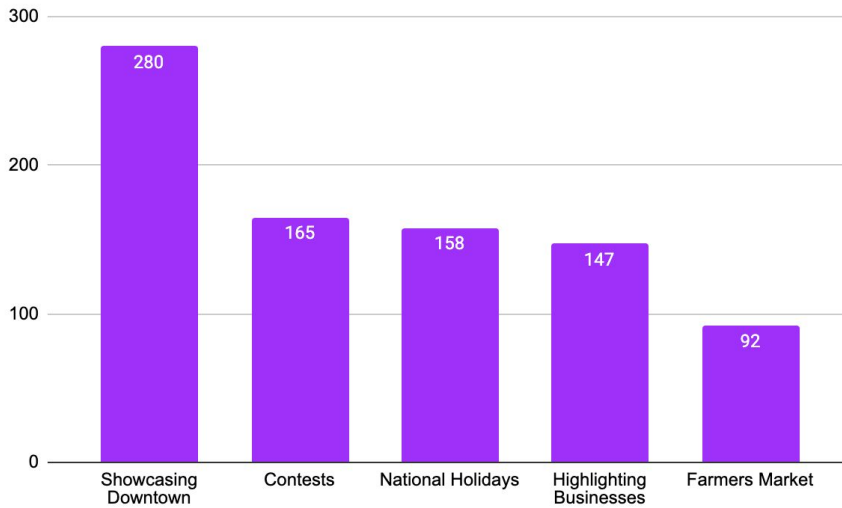
Resident group:
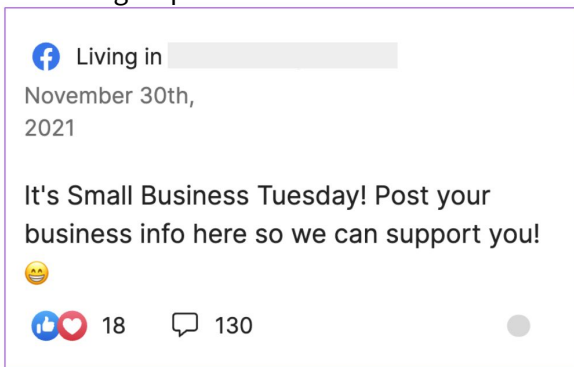
Local news outlet:
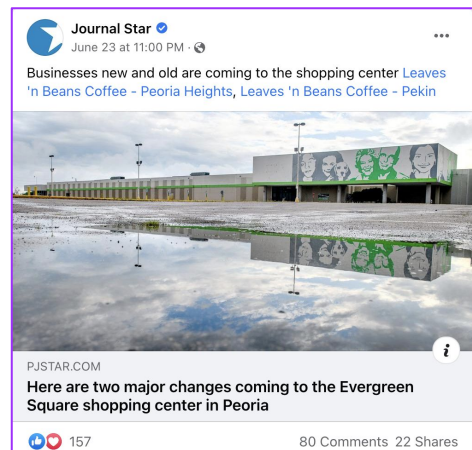
POPULAR TOPIC BREAKDOWN
Interactions per Post

2. Showcase the downtown creatively

Within the top 30 posts published by the cohort, messaging which creatively showcased the downtown generated by far the most excitement amongst users:

- The post that garnered the most attention in this period was a Tik Tok video created by a city's Downtown page, which was re-shared on Facebook. **Using Tik Tok to create videos and resharing them on popular channels may be an emerging tool for cities to promote their downtown**.

- Several Cities also utilized **Facebook Live videos** to share real-time footage of events, stores, or decorations in the downtown. Pre-recorded videos and Facebook Live videos both **prompted more online engagement than photos of the Downtown.**
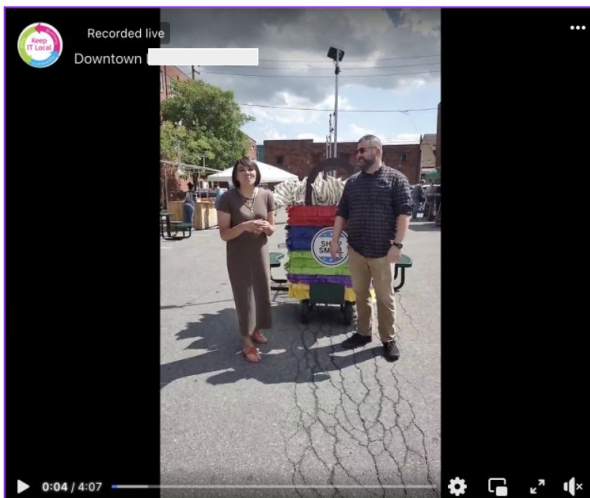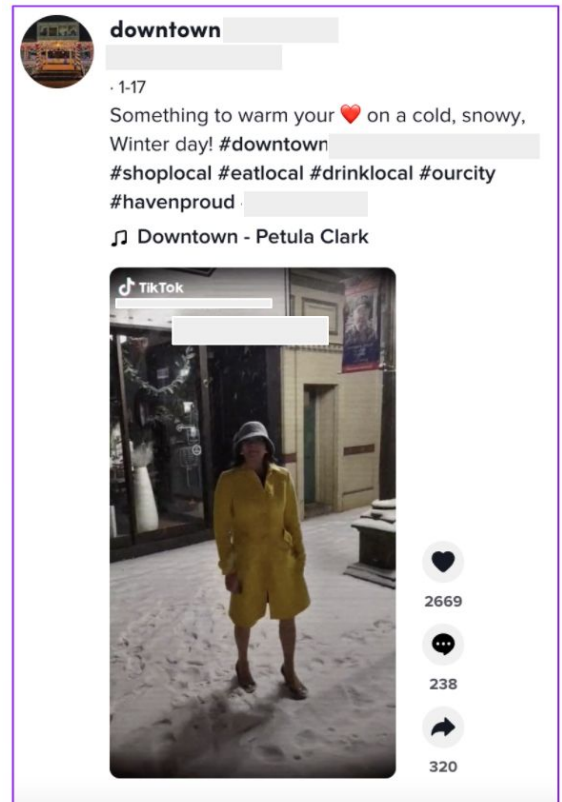
3. Consider implementing innovative contests in order to attract shoppers

A majority (70%) of cohort Zencities implemented contests in order to attract visitors to their local business districts. Posts describing contest rules and winners were the second-most-effective at garnering interest online (165 interactions per post). Popular contests included:
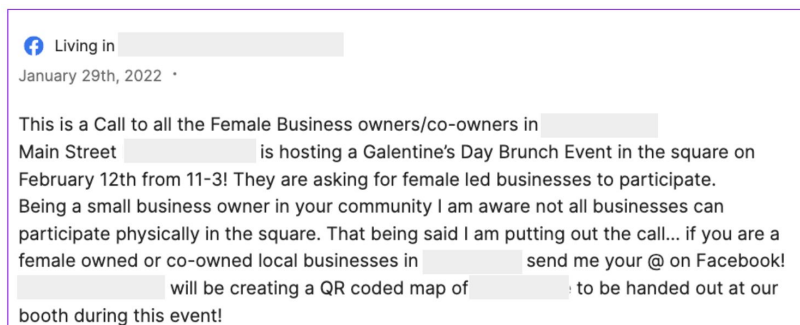
- **Downtown Scavenger Hunt** in which shoppers followed clues that led them through local shops. Winners of the scavenger hunt were gifted items the City purchased from small businesses.
- **Social Media Giveaways:** Several cities partnered with local businesses and asked users to 'like' the business online and tag a friend in order for a chance to win a gift card.
- **Scratch Cards:** One Zencity partner created scratch cards that visitors could pick up downtown and receive a chance to win prizes from local stores.

Shops
January 11 · 🌐

Freezing temps won't scare us away from the ☐ Ice Cream Scoop Shop! Let's celebrate the cold with a giveaway.

👍 This post.
✅ Like the ☐ Shops page on Facebook.
💬 And, tag a friend in the comments below.

We will give one ☐ Ice Cream fanatic a $20 ☐ gift card to celebrate the coldest day of winter (so far 🥶). Winner chosen tomorrow (1/12).

\# ☐ icecream is open 7-days a week:
Mon-Thurs: 1-9pm
Fri & Sat: 1-10pm
Sun: 1-9pm

4. Leverage national holidays throughout the year

In 8 out of 10 of the cohort Zencities, discourse about local businesses peaked throughout Christmas and the New Year. During Holiday season many cities and chambers of commerce increased their messaging in order to encourage residents to shop local. However, **several cities also leveraged other national holidays in order to promote local businesses** throughout the year. Posts that were published in connection with such holidays garnered 158 interactions per post.

- **International Women's Day:** In celebration of International Women's Day (March 8th), a few cohort cities highlighted women-owned businesses in the community. One city also ran a popular **Galentine's Day Event** in with local female vendors.
- **National Small Business Week**: The first week of May was named National Small Business Week, during which several cities ran messaging campaigns aimed at highlighting new and existing local business.
- **Easter** and **Mother's Day** were also popular for business promotion events such as egg-hunts, craft markets, and social media giveaways,

f Living in ☐
January 29th, 2022 · ·

This is a Call to all the Female Business owners/co-owners in ☐
Main Street ☐ is hosting a Galentine's Day Brunch Event in the square on February 12th from 11-3! They are asking for female led businesses to participate. Being a small business owner in your community I am aware not all businesses can participate physically in the square. That being said I am putting out the call... if you are a female owned or co-owned local businesses in ☐ send me your @ on Facebook! ☐ will be creating a QR coded map of ☐ to be handed out at our booth during this event!

Conclusion and Takeaways

- Peoria's discussions aimed at promoting local businesses are positive relative to aggregated data from similar US Zencities. However, users are slightly less engaged in this topic than in the comparison cohort, potentially due to low visibility of posts by Visit Downtown Peoria and Peoria Chamber of Commerce.

- Data from the most successful cohort posts demonstrates the potential impact of partnering with resident groups and local media outlets in order to highlight local businesses. These channels should be used in conjunction with pages dedicated to promoting the City's downtown.

- Posts featuring videos showcasing the downtown garnered high interactions per post. Tik Tok and Facebook Live videos may be effective in creating engaging content.

- Cities across the cohort were successful when implementing local contests such as scavenger hunts and social media giveaways. Leveraging national holidays, such as International Women's Day, National Small Business Week, and Mother's Day were also important in re-engaging residents with local businesses after the Holiday season.

We would highly appreciate any feedback on the report by filling out this [2-min survey](#).

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