

Winning for Rural America: The Strategies Driving Growth in Small Communities

Golden Shovel Agency | March 11, 2025



Presenter



Bethany Quinn
Golden Shovel Agency
President

WHY WE'RE HERE

One economic developer told Golden Shovel, *"Rural communities worldwide face the same challenges. Not enough rooftops. Not the right demographics. Lack of labor pool. Poor transportation if they are off interstates. A lack of amenities."*

*"My continuing question to site selectors is, '**How do we get on your radar?**'"*

WHY WE'RE HERE

CHALLENGES FACED BY RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS

SURVEY RESPONDENTS EXPANDED UPON THESE CHALLENGES:

"We need much more investment in city sewer and other 'unsexy' utilities to guarantee continued growth. These have gone unnoticed for too long, and the investment in new water lines, sewer service, and updates is expensive and bleeds over into housing restrictions."

"We have a major need for housing for low- and moderate-income families. And finding developers and landowners who are not out for top dollar is a challenge. There are a few, but the need exceeds the small population of interested developers."

"We lack ready industrial land and the resources to make them ready."

"Housing that is adequate and attainable is a major challenge, as is childcare. Matching qualifications to workforce requirements is a challenge. Also, adequate electric power is a looming challenge for expanding and new facilities."

"Rural locations mean different things to different people. In western Kansas, rural often means 3-4 hours from a metropolitan area and services needed to support industries looking for opportunity. In most cases, this is a barrier to entry. Some communities are working on quality of place and community development, but geography often rules the decision-making process."

"Rural communities face various challenges that hinder their growth and development."

Financial constraints often limit their ability to invest in critical projects and services. Infrastructure issues, such as limited water and wastewater capacities, create barriers to both residential and business development. Workforce challenges, including a lack of skilled labor and workforce retention difficulties, further compound these struggles. Additionally, rural communities often face limited access to high-speed internet, affordable housing shortages, and a lack of resources to address these pressing issues comprehensively. Despite all this, growth is happening because we are in a megaregion growing faster than communities can support."

ABOUT GOLDEN SHOVEL: **WE DO IT BEST!**

Golden Shovel Agency is a full service web development, strategy, communications, PR and marketing firm. Our proprietary technology and digital tools, such as the Economic Gateway CMS platform, allows us to support the unique attraction and retention needs of economic development, chamber, and tourism organizations. Our custom CMS is continuously being enhanced based new technology and industry trends, enabling us to respond quickly to the needs of our clients through the development of custom solutions.

Our Client Success Managers offer support, ongoing training, and reporting. Our development team ensures seamless hosting, SSL certificate management, bug fixes, and software updates. When combined with our nationally-recognized thought leadership and award-winning campaigns, Golden Shovel provides the opportunity to leverage the most comprehensive expertise in the industry.

GOLDEN SHOVEL EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS

16+

Years in
Business

300+

Projects
Completed

41+

States

5+

Countries

95%

Client Retention
Rate

45+

Team
Members

7+

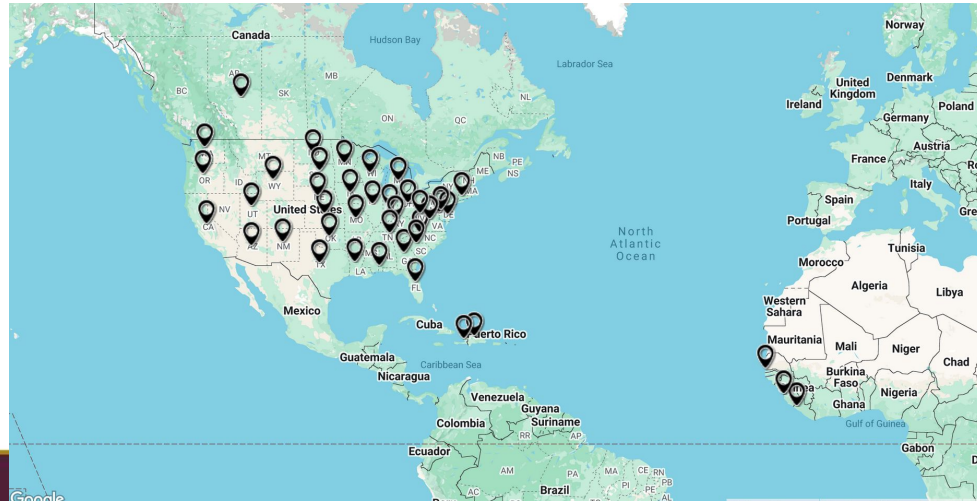
Years Average
Employee Tenure

56%

Faster Website
Launch Times

WE SERVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS IN 41 STATES & 5 COUNTRIES

AWARDS WON



WHAT WE WILL COVER TODAY

- The data
 - Original research by Golden Shovel Agency on **how economic developers are marketing their communities**
- The outcomes
 - Original research by Golden Shovel Agency on the **results economic developers are seeing**
- Best practices
 - Examples of marketing tactics that are driving investment and attracting talent to small communities

What Economic Developers Are Doing to Market their Communities: The Data



KEY FINDINGS

Golden Shovel surveyed economic developers throughout the country and found that...

The majority of economic developers do not have a marketing strategy.

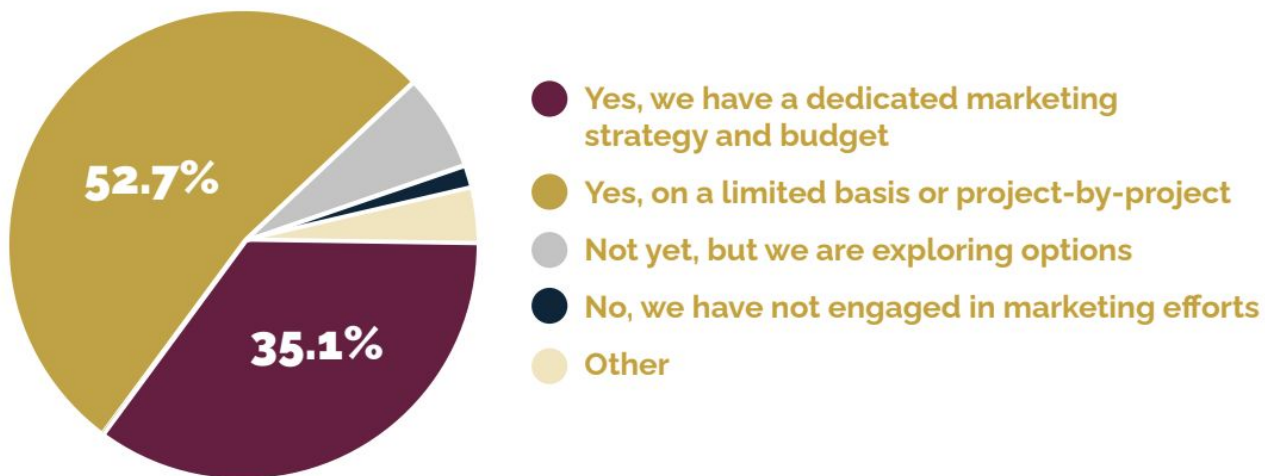
- Most economic developers focus marketing efforts on specific projects, properties, or initiatives.
- Economic developers use a combination of marketing approaches, typically starting with a dedicated website as the foundation for a campaign.
- Those who are marketing are experiencing success, sometimes in non-traditional ways such as increased private investment or securing grant funds.

KEY FINDINGS

Just **35%** of economic developers have a dedicated marketing strategy and a budget to fund plan implementation.



Have You or Your Organization Taken Steps in the Past Five Years to Market or Promote Your Rural Community?



THE DATA



A dedicated economic development website is the foundation for a marketing campaign.

One economic developer explained, *"Investing in a website that provides accessible demographic data for our communities has had a significant impact. The website not only enhances access to vital information but also improves our visibility in economic development searches for the region."*

Social media, events and a digital marketing campaign can drive traffic to the website.

THE DATA

Marketing strategies implemented by economic developers:

- Upgrading to a professional economic development website
- Digital advertising campaigns
- Hosting events and workshops
- Hiring third parties to implement a campaign
- Promoting the community through social media
- Produced professional video tours of sites and the community
- Attending trade shows and events
- Developing a strategic marketing plan
- Sending a monthly newsletter

What Economic Developers Are Doing to Market their Communities: The Results



THE DATA

One challenge economic developers face is determining how to measure the success of a marketing campaign. Investors often require it, and while there are nuances to data collection and analysis, economic developers report on campaign success by measuring increases in financial investments or revenue, new business inquiries, employment rates, and website traffic.

Economic developers are also finding value in conducting surveys and receiving feedback from stakeholders, such as local businesses or investors, on the impact of their campaigns. These are the baseline metrics that, when increased, can lead to long-term, more impactful wins for the community.

THE DATA

How Does Your Community Currently Measure the Success of its Economic Development & Marketing Efforts?

58.1%

Financial
Investments
or Revenue

52.7%

New Business
Inquiries

52.7%

Employment
Rates

45.9%

Website
Traffic

THE DATA

The **majority of survey respondents** reporting that their **marketing campaigns are producing real results.**

- Enhancing their digital presence
- Helping local businesses expand
- Creating startups
- Revitalizing the downtown
- Attracting new businesses to the community



Another respondent described how their **marketing efforts led people to move to their community.** "We participate in the MakeMyMove program and have had people move in. We have also secured grants for community improvement and downtown revitalization."

If You Have Marketed or Supported Your Rural Community, What Successes Have You Achieved?



62.2%

Enhancing
their Digital
Presence



58.1%

Helping Local
Businesses
Expand



52.7%

Creating
Startups



50%

Revitalizing
their Downtown



47.3%

Attracting
New Businesses
to the Community



THE DATA

Survey-Reported Business Attraction & Expansion Wins

- Boring Company, Starlink, and X coming to the community
- Our largest industrial employer created an additional 200 jobs and invested \$200 million
- A 70-unit apartment complex being built by an outside investor
- Senior living facilities are being built across many of our rural communities
- Hilmar Cheese and Flora Foods opening, creating value-added opportunities for local dairymen who want to keep their milk closer to home
- Landing a \$200 million, 500-acre distribution development project
- Recruitment of TJ Maxx and a Starbucks
- Bringing McDermott Aviation to the South Alabama Regional Airport to establish their North American HQ

THE DATA

Survey-Reported Workforce Wins

- More businesses and students participating in West Virginia's 'Explore the New Manufacturing' program that connects manufacturers partner with middle and high school students
- Attracting new talent through the Ascend WV program
- New talent moving to our region through the Love, Montgomery County attraction campaign
- **New professionals are moving to our region** through MakeMyMove!
- Students engaged through VR workforce training for middle and high school students



THE DATA

Survey-Reported Funding Wins

- Increasing member investment levels
- Raising millions more through multi-year campaigns
- Securing grants for site development, workforce initiatives, downtown revitalization, and tourism
- Development of public-private partnerships to phs forward key initiatives

BEYOND EXPECTATIONS: HOW THE GREATER SPRINGFIELD PARTNERSHIP SURPASSED ITS CAPITAL CAMPAIGN GOALS

February 26, 2025

The **Greater Springfield Partnership (GSP)** recently concluded its EXPAND 2029 capital campaign, raising more than \$6.5 million – a 60% increase from its previous campaign in 2020. This success is a stunning display of community trust, organizational excellence, and community commitment. The Partnership's ambitious goal and ability to deliver on its promises are the primary reasons for the tremendous increase in funding from the previous campaign.



THE DATA

Survey-Reported Award Wins

- Best Economic Development Practices by the Economic Developers Association of Canada (EDAC)
- EDASC became the first Accredited Economic Development Organization in the Pacific NW
- Marketing Awards from the International Economic Development Council
- Agro Innovator of the Year Award for 2020 in Nigeria
- Inducted into the REDNews Real Estate Icons for 2024
- Alabama Community of Excellence
- Professional certification of Industrial Parks
- Became a Certified Tourism Friendly City

AWARDS WON



What Economic Developers Are Doing to Market their Communities: Best Practices



Develop a Marketing Strategy

→ Create a roadmap to guide your marketing efforts and ensure consistency.

Benefits of a marketing strategy -

- **Proactive vs. Reactive:** Plan ahead to align marketing efforts with community goals.
- **Brand Consistency:** Stay focused and become known for your best assets.
- **Accountability:** Ensure marketing efforts **happen!**
- **Long-term Impact:** Communities without a strategy often market on a project-by-project basis, limiting long-term impact.



Create a Unique Value Proposition (UVP)

→ Your community cannot be all things to all people.

A Unique Value Proposition will help you ...

- **Stand Out:** If your marketing messages sound like “anywhere USA” no one will remember you.
- **Attract the Right Investment:** Make it clear to target industries why your community is right for them.
- **Enhances Marketing Effectiveness:** A clear and compelling message makes outreach efforts more successful.

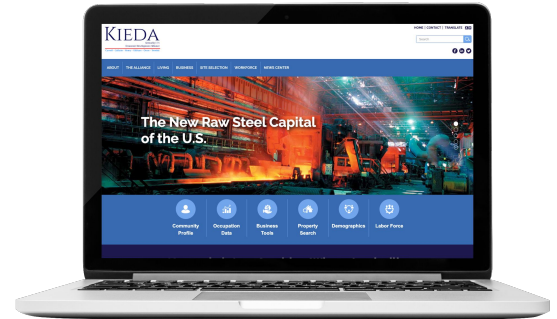


Create a Strong Digital Presence

→ **Economic development websites are the foundation of successful marketing.**

✓ Example: Falls City, NE, used their site-specific microsite and marketing campaign to attract a **\$5 billion investment**. Their targeted economic development website provided site selectors with the data necessary to make an informed decision.

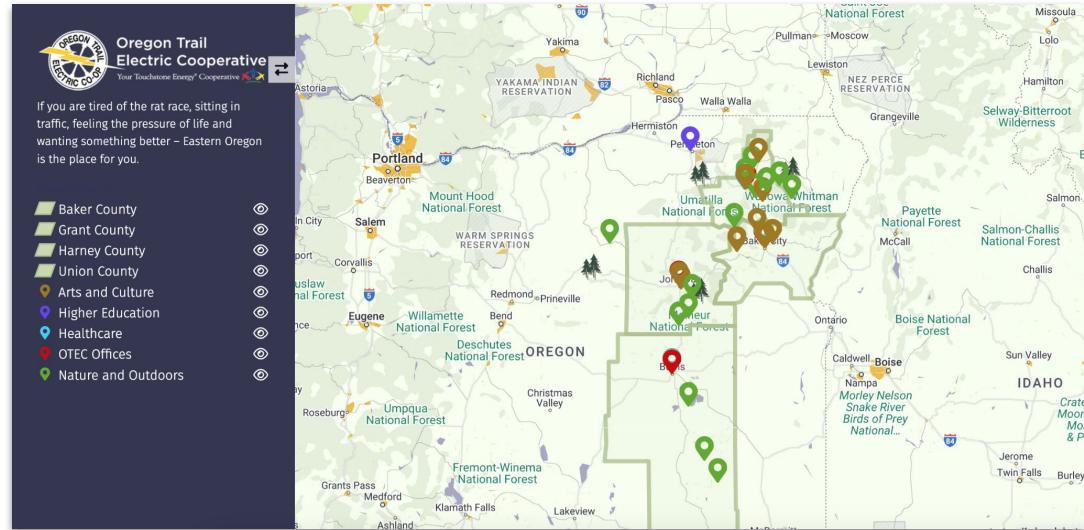
→ You need an economic development website to even be considered for projects.



Use Marketing to Bring Stakeholders Together

The Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative (OTEC) needed a website that could adequately **represent four separate counties**. They partnered with Golden Shovel to create it.

"We know that first impressions matter and prospective businesses are strongly influenced by the usability of a region's economic development website...We are happy to have a reliable partner like Golden Shovel to lean on." - OTEC Team



Boost Your Website's Visibility with SEO Best Practices

→ **SEO helps your community rank higher in search results, attracting businesses and investors.**

- **Targeted Keywords:** Use industry-specific and location-based keywords to ensure your site is found by the right audience.
- **On-Page Optimization:** Ensure proper use of meta titles, descriptions, header tags, and mobile-friendly design.
- **Content Strategy:** Regularly update content with blogs, success stories, and economic development news to improve rankings.

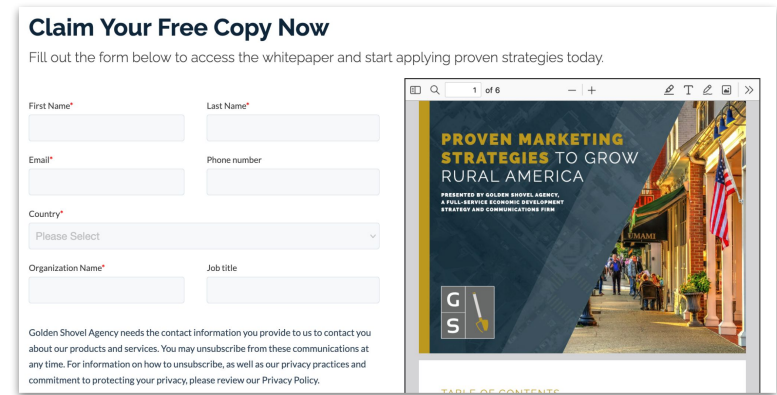


Optimize Your Landing Pages to Convert Visitors into Leads

→ Create campaign-specific landing pages.

- **Keep It Simple:** Short, engaging forms improve conversion rates.
- **Clear CTA:** Use action-driven language like "Download Our Community Profile" or "Schedule a Consultation."
- **Visual Appeal:** Use images, maps, and videos to enhance engagement.

Follow-Up Strategy: Automate email responses and set up a follow-up process to engage leads.



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Email* Phone number

Country*
Please Select

Organization Name* Job title

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PROVEN MARKETING STRATEGIES TO GROW RURAL AMERICA

PRESENTED BY GOLDEN SHOVEL AGENCY, A FULL-SERVICE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND COMMUNICATIONS FIRM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Use Reverse IP Tools to Track Website Visitors

→ Take control by calling site visitors.

Reports can be configured to the needs of the organization. You can specify relevant job titles or seniority levels to filter for relevant decision-makers.

Contact information includes:

- **Business name**
- **Contact details of key decision makers**
- **Telephone, email and LinkedIn details**
- **Financial data**

Visit Date/Time	Visitor
03/11/2017 09:27	Alfred Cheyne Engineering Ltd
03/11/2017 09:29	Alfred Cheyne Engineering Ltd
03/11/2017 10:38	Axiom Manufacturing Services Limited
03/11/2017 11:11	James Fisher and Sons Plc
03/11/2017 11:17	Highlander Computing Solutions Ltd
03/11/2017 11:56	Plymouth University
03/11/2017 11:58	Esben Business IT Solutions
03/11/2017 12:09	iSmart Consumer Solutions
03/11/2017 12:20	University of Southampton
11/03/2017 13:01	Dewhurst UK
03/11/2017 13:43	University of Leeds
03/11/2017 13:58	Datascope Systems Ltd
11/03/2017 14:21	LeadForensics
03/11/2017 16:22	Clarion Events
03/11/2017 18:47	Matrox
03/11/2017 19:21	Lifesize
04/11/2017 02:30	Jiangsu Gongchang Roll Joint-stock Co Ltd
04/11/2017 05:23	Jiangsu Gongchang Roll Joint-stock Co Ltd
04/11/2017 11:36	SRIT India Pvt Ltd
06/11/2017 08:53	Datascope Systems Ltd
06/11/2017 10:44	Elcometer Limited
06/11/2017 10:45	Instro Precision Ltd
06/11/2017 11:26	Capula Limited
06/11/2017 11:30	North West Regional College
06/11/2017 11:53	The University of Manchester
06/11/2017 12:32	Glasgow City Council Education Services



Create a 360 Social Media & Digital Advertising Campaign

→ A 360 campaign will reach target audiences using digital ads, engage them with visually-appealing content & direct them to a form on your website.

✓ Example: Montgomery County, KS, used digital marketing to attract new residents and workforce talent.

→ Consider the entire journey someone takes to interact with your organization. Make every interaction count.



Use Video & Virtual Reality for Site Promotion

→ **Videos and VR tours provide immersive experiences for site selectors and investors.**

✓ Example: York County, NE, used VR site tours to fill available business sites faster.

Use video to:

- Alter perceptions
- Show the site's connectivity to transportation
- Tour the site and community
- Give site selectors tools to measure the space



Tell Your Community's Story in a Compelling Way

→ Highlight success stories, lifestyle benefits, and business advantages.

✓ Example: Greater Springfield, OH, showcased a new distribution center, attracting further investment from Sheetz.

Use content to:

- Demonstrate the success businesses are having
- Prove why your community is right for a particular industry
- Take control of the narrative



Rapid expansion: Sheetz building in Springfield, several area cities



Host Targeted Events to Attract Investment & Talent

→ **Showcase your community through in-person events.**

✓ Foreign Investment Bus Tours – Example: Host foreign investors to showcase industrial sites and workforce strengths.

✓ Business Conferences & Industry Summits – Example: The Wyoming Business Council hosted the Connecting Entrepreneurial Conference to promote startups.

✓ Tourism Events – Example: Hosting a Major League Fishing Tournament or Burger Showdown to boost tourism.



Leverage Public Relations & Media Coverage

→ The content Golden Shovel writes is often featured in larger publications - creating awareness and expanding readership.

✓ State Coverage – Example: Iowa Lakes Corridor's summer tourism article was promoted by the state.

✓ "Best Of..." Recognition – Example: Selma named Top 6 Places to Visit in Alabama.

✓ Industry & Business Publications – Example: Odessa, Texas featured on the Daily Caller.



Odessa Fuels Business Growth and Expansion

20 DEC 2024

Business-friendly communities like Odessa, Texas, create an environment for industry-changing businesses and dynamic leadership to thrive. Many companies in the Permian Basin have grown into global leaders in their field or are achieving notable success, such as Liberty Energy, one of multiple companies to expand or relocate to Odessa in 2024. President-elect Donald Trump recently tapped [Liberty CEO Chris Wright](#) as his pick for Secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy.

Economic development incentives fuel growth

In March 2024, Liberty Energy, a top North American energy service company providing completion services and technologies to onshore oil and natural gas exploration and production companies, broke ground on a \$50 million regional headquarters now under construction in Odessa. In a recent [Business Expansion Journal](#), Liberty Oil indicated the Odessa location will allow the company to consolidate multiple facilities while leaving space for further expansion. At the Leeco Industrial Park groundbreaking ceremony, Wright said Liberty Energy was excited about the new facility and the opportunity to deliver services more efficiently.

"We are in the business of bettering human lives, and there is no better place to make that happen than in Odessa, Texas, the heart of the Permian Basin," Wright said.



Educate the Community through Social Media

→ Help stakeholders & community members to understand what economic development is, how it benefits them & your organization's role in strengthening the community.

✓ Example: Wyandotte Economic Development Council's EcoDevo 101 campaign.

- Make economic development relatable
- Increase support for economic development efforts
- Bring the community together & create ambassadors



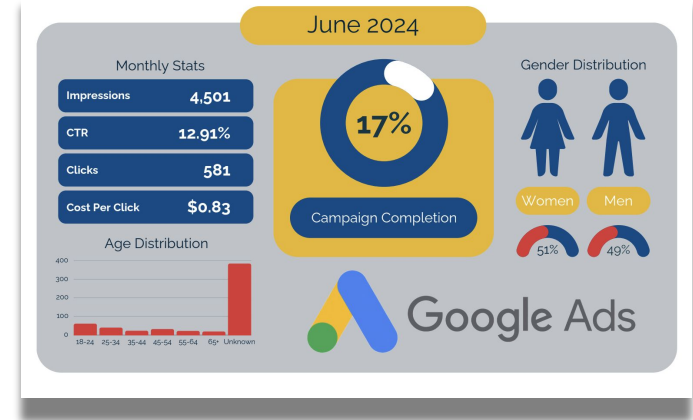
Measure Success & Track Wins

→ **Data-driven decision-making helps secure funding and attract investors.**

✓ Example: Economic developers track new business inquiries, grant funding, and increased website traffic as key metrics.

Use data to:

- Showcase wins
- Demonstrate the investment & work required to see results
- Adjust campaign strategies



Additional Resources



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Thank You! Any Questions?

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