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Ads to sell 'essence' of Louisville

Campaign intended to lure 'quality people'

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One Louisville lad grew up to become the greatest boxing champion of all time and an international peacemaker. Another from the area founded a worldwide pizza chain.

The world's most famous baseball bat is made here, and its most famous horse race is run here.

Welcome to Louisville, "Possibility City."

That's the theme of the most comprehensive community marketing effort since Hazel Miller recorded "Look What We Can Do, Louisville" a quarter-century ago.

Although it doesn't yet have a catchy tune, or even a logo, the campaign is targeting young professionals, talented people and businesses, hoping to entice "quality people" to come to Louisville.

Officials say the time for the promotion is ripe, in part because of significant downtown development that is under way and on the horizon, as well as the success of the city-county merger that took effect in 2003.

The first peek at the promotional campaign, 18 months in the making and expected to continue into at least 2009, will be tomorrow night with several TV commercials during the UK-U of L football game.

The campaign is geared "to get people talking about the possibilities," said Eileen Pickett, a senior vice president with Greater Louisville Inc., the metro chamber of commerce, who is coordinating the campaign.

The city has committed \$300,000, with Greater Louisville Inc. and the Convention & Visitors Bureau chipping in sums that haven't been decided, officials said. The ad agencies developing the campaign are donating much of their time, and the media may run the ads at low cost or as public-service spots, the officials said.

So far, six 30-second TV spots, which will premier during the game, have been produced, along with three 60-second radio ads.

Mayor Jerry Abramson said it's an attempt to tell more people about Louisville's special qualities.

"As we compete with other regions for jobs, people, companies and visitors, it's critical that we invest in telling people what Louisville is all about," he said. "And we have a heck of a story to tell."

Ben Barbercheck, president of ad agency Red7e, which is helping develop the promotions, said results of the campaign might be hard to measure, but he is confident the "cheeky" ads will pay off.

The TV ads take potshots at bigger cities such as Atlanta, Boston and Los Angeles. Each ad ends by saying Louisville doesn't have many big-city problems and is "a city of possibilities."

One radio ad tells listeners that in Louisville, "the sidewalks never crack," while another proclaims that "you can drink a mint julep with your chop suey, and no one raises an eyebrow."

The campaign includes an interactive Web site, www.sharelouisville.org, which goes online today.

The campaign is rooted in research by Horizon Research International of Louisville, which was paid \$200,000 by the campaign, said Paul Schulte, the company's president.

Horizon found that residents have strong impressions of Louisville as having "a real sense of balance" -- small enough to be comfortable, but big enough to have many advantages. With sports and the arts, it's vibrant, but relaxed.

But Horizon found that outsiders "don't know much about us at all," Schulte said.

Louisville was most noted for Louisville Slugger bats, Schulte said, and many people know about the Derby, but aren't sure where in Kentucky it's held.

Locally, the research showed many people "are hard-pressed to say what makes us different," and, outside of Louisville, the city isn't on very many minds, Barbercheck said.

Those are two key things the campaign hopes to change, he said.

Chris Johnson, president of the Leadership Louisville Center, which sponsors programs for young professionals, said the campaign is designed to get Louisvillians talking about its unique qualities that they often take for granted, such as being the home of Muhammad Ali, the Louisville Slugger, and Papa John's Pizza founder John Schnatter.

The sponsors say they believe the campaign addresses the "essence" of what Louisville is and the possibilities that exist here.

"I think it will resonate with people, hit a nerve," Pickett said.

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