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SHORT NEWS

Trash-talking from the Establishment? Oh, my

By LEO Weekly

Somewhere in America, a doltish woodenhead thinks downtown Louisville is an idyll of rolling hills, brown wooden fences and the occasional simpleton riding a horse. Grass?

Try concrete jungle, bubba from Boston — or Atlanta, Dallas, Los Angeles or the state of Ohio! Your city (or state, really) is a heap of steamy stool compared to this burgeoning burg!

This is the basic tenor of a new TV-ad campaign by the Greater Louisville Community Branding Project, a collective of city and local ad agencies trying to cast the city in a certain cosmopolitan, progressive light — for all the haters and know-nothings out there who think Louisville is part of Kentucky.

“There is no image,” Eileen Pickett, senior VP of Greater Louisville Inc., the Metro chamber of commerce, said during a recent meeting with LEO. “We’re a blank slate” to people out there, who’ve never been to Louisville.

While the city ranked highly among people who either live here or have stayed here awhile, Pickett said, a year’s worth of intensive research revealed that most people don’t know jack about us. That’s troubling for a city trying really, really hard to lure new businesses — and the concomitant so-called young talent.

“Really what this is about is expressing something about Louisville so that (outsiders) are willing to try it,” Pickett said.

Four of the six TV ads the project created have aired — two debuted during Saturday’s U of L-UK football game. The timing of the debut is befitting: Each ad trash-talks another city in favor of ours, tagging Louisville “possibility city” or some variation on that theme. In them, Atlanta is an overcrowded parking lot; even a woman with a good job can’t afford to own a house in Boston; a man from Dallas yearns for a more progressive city where he can “shout from the courthouse steps: I eat tofu! And I do play the cello!”; Los Angeles is a place where a young woman will be valued on the merits of her plastic surgeries, not her ideas; there is zero urban opportunity in the entire state of Ohio.

All of this is boasted by a political-campaign-ad-like voiceover laced into melodramatic sweeps of string music. (Watch the ads at www.sharelouisville.org.)

Stereotypes? Sure. Inaccurate ones? Largely, yes. Weird? Absolutely.

While Mayor Abramson might have some ‘splainin’ to do at the next U.S. Conference of Mayors (Metro chucked \$300,000 into the campaign), those involved say it’s simple provocation to get some eyes — and the jabs shouldn’t be taken too literally.

“The self-effacing thing is a big part of the brand,” Dan Barbercheck, president of red7e, the agency responsible for the ads, said.

And that leads us to the three radio ads, part two of this campaign. Frankly, they capture much more the actual vibe of this city, which tends to not talk so much shit — at least to the outside: Self-deprecating and mildly iconoclastic, slightly confused about self-image, boasting and convivial but still preternaturally weird.

That’s what matters here. The target of this ad/branding campaign is largely local, with the hope that word-of-mouth will spread just enough to get the ‘Ville “on the list,” according to Pickett. If it’s a business, visitors or simply some young “talent,” these folks just want the city to be in decision-making heads — which doesn’t seem too bad.

The whole thing is sure to piss some people off, leave others unsettled, summon a gut-laugh, and at least touch a nerve or two — which is ultimately the point. That, and to make sure everybody knows Louisville is a “possibility city.”

So what if marketing our relatively quiet, comfortable and mostly excellent burg to the outside world actually works and our roads become congested and housing costs skyrocket and we actually build those damn bridges that just make the whole downtown experience ugly and more polluted and generally unpleasant to be around?

Like anything else here, it’s a possibility. —Stephen George

A thumbprint for some used CDs? Probably

In case you haven’t heard, there is a serious problem with people stealing copper and aluminum. Mostly a trade of meth-freaks and pill-heads eager for the relatively high return (no pun intended) of the finer metals of construction sites and air conditioning units, the latest crop of the petty-theft industry has really become a bother: police, builders, owners of air conditioners, aluminum gutters and siding, scrap metal dealers; the list of the pissed goes on and on.

It irked the Metro Council enough to get involved. And now, that involvement has seeped into, of all things, the business of secondhand stores — and more particularly, the business of used CDs, DVDs and video games. Soon, you may have your driver’s license scanned every time you sell one of those things, and that information will be stored, along with what you sold, in an on-site database. And if the business doesn’t invest in new technology to do that, the clerk will take your thumbprint, photocopy your ID, and stick it in a box somewhere until the police need to access it.

The new regulations have some local business owners unnerved.

“I just don’t think they understand how this will affect small businesses,” said John Timmons, owner of ear X-tacy, after Monday’s meeting.

It appears the co-sponsors of the ordinance — Kevin Kramer, R-11, and Kelly Downard, R-12 — agreed: They included a caveat, to be introduced before the full council votes on the ordinance next Thursday, that would stipulate a 120-day waiting period for the ordinance to apply to stores dealing with used CDs, DVDs, video games and possibly others.

It’s an effort to help police track and catch petty criminals, but the dive into small businesses — and some large ones, like Half Price Books and FYE — is something all sides will discuss in the coming four months. According to the committee, a machine to scan the barcode on the back of your driver’s license would cost \$372 per store; along with the storage software, the total cost would be \$749 — assuming the business already operates on a computer system.

Timmons said ear X-tacy already tracks cash payouts. Owners of Book & Music Exchange and Great Escape, who were also at Monday’s meeting, said the same. However, the new regulations would also apply to trade-ins and store credits, which nobody really regulates now.

“The bottom line is, somebody is going to question the fact that the 21-year-old guy behind the counter is going to be swiping his driver’s license and keeping it on file, and that is going to be a big problem” for customers, said Cleo Saltsman Jr., owner of Book & Music Exchange.

Saltsman and others also worry they’ll lose business to those who aren’t following the law, and they’re concerned about the priority of police enforcement of that aspect.

The full council will vote on the ordinance next Thursday. —SG

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