MADISON, MAINE:
Reinventing a Small Town Economy

SOWING THE SEEDS FOR NEW INDUSTRY
Founded in 1804, the rural town of Madison, Maine thrived through the early 1900s thanks to the operation of several successful mills. In the 1960s and 70s manufacturing activity began to decline across the U.S., and many of these mills closed shop or moved elsewhere. With the area’s one remaining paper mill, Madison Paper, as the primary supporter of Madison’s workforce and tax base, the town recognized a critical need to shore up its future by diversifying the local economy.

While the challenges that Madison faced were not unique, the town’s efforts to promote economic development have been highly effective. Madison’s success can be attributed to three key factors:

- leadership and community commitment
- innovative use of tax incentive programs and support funds
- a proactive strategic marketing, public relations and sales program

In 2002, the town’s new 55-acre business park, Madison Business Gateway (MBG), was ready for development. With this significant offering added to its arsenal of economic development tools, the town could be more competitive in courting new businesses and companies looking to expand. However, the MBG committee knew it had a great deal of competition. It determined that an amped-up sales strategy and an aggressive marketing campaign were needed to create the level of excitement and attention Madison needed to turn its economy around.

The town worked with Nancy Marshall Communications (NMC) to develop and execute a Marshall Plan, a comprehensive, multi-year communications strategy integrating public relations and marketing to position Madison as a great place to do business.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY
The Marshall Plan process began with the research and identification of Madison’s brand strengths. These attributes included:

- low-cost electricity
- an available, educated and productive workforce
- affordable real estate costs
- a business-friendly community
- competitive tax incentive program
- a good quality of life

These strengths became focal points of the campaign and were consistently communicated through news releases, community events, a website (www.madisonbusinessgateway.com), print and electronic newsletters, a DVD presentation, advertisements and trade show appearances.

Throughout the campaign, the agency kept abreast of important trends by regularly reviewing economic development trade publications, academic research and mainstream media coverage. Using the knowledge garnered through these reviews, NMC modified its strategies, prospect materials, and media relations efforts to ensure promotional endeavors remained aligned with the priorities of site selection consultants and C-level executives.

In addition to securing publication of economic development guest columns penned by Madison leaders, NMC also generated positive stories about the town and its business attraction efforts as well as success stories about individual local companies. In a period of just 12 months, there were more than 30 positive placements generated in national site selection publications as well as Maine print, radio and television outlets.

When Madison was ready hire a full-time economic development director, NMC assisted by creating an advertisement highlighting the unique job skills the position required and developed an interview format to ensure Madison would be able to identify the best match for the position. Once the economic development director was on board, the agency worked closely with her to research and target specific industries poised for growth.
As the years progressed, the strategy was adjusted to take advantage of new opportunities. The website, for example, was enhanced to emphasize the now fully-developed brand, incorporate more audio and video, and provide the most up-to-date information on the community.

**A BIG PAY OFF**

The well-coordinated efforts of the town’s economic development office and NMC soon captured the attention of Backyard Farms, a Massachusetts-based hydroponic tomato producer looking to expand.

Members of the company’s management team discovered Madison after spotting an article about MBG in a Maine newspaper that highlighted the low-cost electricity available there. After representatives met with the MBG committee, it was determined that the size of the planned greenhouse (24 acres initially) was too large for the business park, but a suitable location was secured nearby.

Backyard Farms has proven to be a huge achievement for the town. The greenhouse celebrated the one-year anniversary of its Madison facility in 2007 by breaking ground for a second 18-acre greenhouse. Backyard Farms, now the largest New England greenhouse grower of vine-ripened tomatoes, harvested the first crop of tomatoes in its second facility in September 2009. The company, which offers its employees above average wages and benefits, also completed hiring an additional 75 local workers, bringing its total workforce to approximately 200. It has also generated a significant amount of positive publicity for Madison, including a feature in The New York Times that showcased the town’s low-cost electricity and business-friendly community – impactful messages that can help sustain continued business interest and development in Madison.

Since the economic development efforts began, nearly 20 new businesses have located in town. Ultra Fine Line, a specialty twine company, arrived in 2006. After reading about Madison’s low electric rates in the news, the founder decided to bring the company back to Maine after more than 10 years of operating in Florida. Veterinarian Darrin Richards opened his practice as the first MBG tenant and had such an influx of clients that he hired another vet to work with him.

**PURSUING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

Madison sets the bar high for success. Recognizing a strong marketing strategy has no “finish line,” the town understands that building and sustaining a vibrant local economy demands constant effort. The past several years have resulted in great gains, but the committee and the town are only encouraged by their success and believe that through sustained marketing, public relations and direct outreach to prospective businesses, even more can be accomplished. With the primary goal of job creation, they continue to work to attract companies that will provide opportunities to residents of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.