

**SMALL
NATION™**

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Bryan Ohio

Live the sweet life.

| CASE STUDY |

BRYAN, OHIO

Effective downtown revitalization means showing your authentic potential.

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Small towns across the country are asking the same questions: How do we attract new residents and visitors in the shadow of big-city competition? How do we keep young residents from leaving town for perceptibly greener pastures? How do we bring visitors to our downtown to explore, shop, and then return? How do we revitalize... effectively?

A sweet formula for success.

Over the years, Small Nation has heard these questions from small towns across the country again and again. Bryan, Ohio, was one of those small towns.

Amy Miller, CEO of the Bryan Area Foundation, reached out to Small Nation in 2021 on behalf of their Community Impact Committee for help with their revitalization goals.

Small Nation has developed a system to help small towns like Bryan clarify their goals, identify their assets and possibilities, and create real, actionable plans for moving forward. The Small Town Success™ Formula includes a blend of immersive experiences, one-on-one consulting, financing strategies, design direction, and brand building.

Our system guides small towns in identifying existing opportunities that may have been hidden in plain sight for years. It is a comprehensive service and consulting package, including a tour of Bellefontaine, an Insight Visit to your town, a Downtown Assessment, Community Branding, and Redevelopment Strategies, including suggestions for effective reuse of historic buildings, development and attraction of a target tenant mix, architectural renderings,

“Every time Small Nation met with someone in our community, they left them with something of real value. They left them with ideas they could implement that day to make their business better in some way.”

Amy Miller, CEO, Bryan Area Foundation

and communication with the community throughout the growth process.

Bryan, Ohio was interested in engaging our formula to help develop a revitalization strategy. Like many small towns with limited or 100% allocated budgets, finding the financial funding to invest in professional services and consulting can be challenging. In order to be proactive about making real change happen quickly, The Bryan Area Foundation established a non-endowed project fund that was used to invest in their downtown's revitalization. Using only retained earnings, the Foundation was able to use unrestricted funds to invest in services, development, and construction of community-approved changes. Bryan's creative approach is an inspiring model for how small towns can move successfully toward the future rather than be stopped by the red-tape that often comes with funding approval.

On-the-ground research leads to ideas that work

To kick off our work together, the city of Bryan brought a group of stakeholders to downtown Bellefontaine for a full-day Downtown Insight tour. Our visitors from Bryan walked the streets with us and got to speak with our downtown business owners in their stores and offices about how the changes that have happened in Bellefontaine



| SMALL TOWN. BIG IMPACT. |

Downtown Bryan, Ohio has seen measurable revitalization results from the Small Town Success Formula in just two short years.

How? They engaged the community and invested in an actionable plan. Learn more about Downtown Bryan at visitbryanohio.com.



have impacted their success. Being on the streets in Bellefontaine not only helped them learn how we strategized about Bellefontaine’s revitalization, but helped them see real-life possibilities for their town as well.

Soon following the Downtown Insight Tour, Small Nation spent a day at downtown Bryan, gathering insights from local business owners and community stakeholders about the town’s needs and potential. Together, we identified areas where there might be potential for new business types, community animation points, and redevelopment, including how they might navigate zoning and building codes to renovate historic or vacant spaces.

Our tour days together were the basis for a comprehensive Downtown Development Assessment outlining tangible, actionable recommendations about how to begin the revitalization process in Bryan. Our recommendations included the development of a marketable destination brand for the community, a Downtown Bryan website, marketing photography and video, the creation of a mural for “Instagrammable moments,” and the design of parklets placed in strategic locations throughout the downtown area to help animate the streetscape with seating and places for people to linger.

The centerpiece of our recommendations was to identify an anchor business in the heart of downtown that would draw visitors and shoppers of all ages year-round. Bryan, Ohio, is home to the Spangler Candy Company, makers of Dum Dum Lollipops, and one of the world’s biggest manufacturers of candy canes. Small Nation recommended bringing Spangler’s presence downtown as a consumer-facing candy center.

Celina, Ohio-based architectural firm Revival Design Collective created facade renderings to help Bryan’s stakeholder group visualize how the candy-center might look when complete. This inspired Spangler Candies to move its museum and gift store to downtown Bryan. Spangler Candy World opened in the summer of 2023, with interactive historical displays, activities for all ages, a retail store with candy and merchandise, and a big-screen theater tour of the factory.

Community input matters

Gathering input from the community is essential when developing a town’s brand. Led by the Bryan Area Foundation, a stakeholder group was gathered that included local business owners, city representatives, and community members. Small Nation partnered with HANDSHOE Brand + Design, a local firm with extensive experience in developing destination brands, to lead an envisioning meeting with the stakeholder



Bryan community envisioning meeting with stakeholders



Mural concept- Etch A Sketch was created in Bryan, Ohio



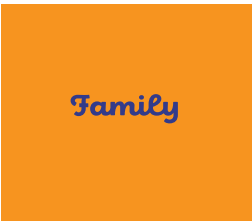
Jason Duff (Small Nation), Amy Miller (Bryan Area Foundation), Nick Davis, (Small Nation)



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After the development of two creative concepts, we engaged in an ad-driven A/B test via social media to gauge responsiveness to each direction. The A/B test ad campaign presented brand messaging for each concept and was targeted to engage Bryan residents and surrounding counties in the state of Ohio. The concept that received the most engagement was ultimately selected



group. Collaboratively, we worked together to identify what unique elements differentiate Bryan from other communities so the brand we developed was not only effective in informing people about Bryan's physical assets but also add an authentic spirit that would engage public interest and create marketable demand. Strong destination brands are not just reflective of a community's assets. The best destination brands find a way to engage the emotional wants and needs of the people who will visit, work, live, and play there.

Bryan had five key goals:

- 1) To engage the interest of young families in their 20s and 30s
- 2) To instill a sense of community pride
- 3) To stay family-focused
- 4) To encourage restaurant and small business growth
- 5) To make people realize that Bryan is a great place to visit and an even better place to live.

Based on our research and after receiving feedback from the stakeholder group and testing concepts with the community at large, the key messaging for Bryan, Ohio was agreed upon.

In Bryan, life is just a little bit sweeter. Yes, it smells like candy in the air, but that's where their sweetness lies. Bryan's sweetness comes from deep inside. It's in the people and the places that live there and care about one another. And it's in their dedication making the lives of everyone who lives in or visits their small town just a little bit sweeter too. Live and play in Bryan, Ohio and "Make Life Sweet."

Visually speaking

Successful destination brands have many touchpoints for local communities to leverage, and Bryan was no exception. To that end, we developed a unique visual identity system to support the city's messaging. The Bryan logo is fresh, youthful, and engaging, reflecting their brand message and key goals.

Small Nation also helped Bryan develop a custom mural design representing the Make Life Sweet tagline, which was painted on the side of a local business building. The Make Life Sweet mural is now a popular spot for locals and visitors alike to take pictures.

The sweetness of life had to be reflected in the physical manifestation of Bryan's downtown as well, so Small



Downtown Bryan destination website



Branded merch to instill community pride



Downtown "Instagrammable location" mural



Nation worked with Revival Design Collective to develop a series of parklets, where people can meet and inspire sweet moments of community connection.

In the end, Bryan executed a large number of Small Nation's recommendations for the repositioning and revitalization of their downtown.

Two years later

Two years later, Bryan, Ohio is experiencing many benefits as a result of the town-wide revitalization efforts. Amy Miller, CEO of the Bryan Area Foundation, explained that there is construction happening everywhere in their downtown area, because their work through the Small Town Success™ Formula has inspired additional investment from other community members and organizations.

"Restaurants, cafes, and boutiques are thriving, new businesses have opened downtown, and our spruced-up streetscape is bustling with activity from both locals and visitors alike who come to take advantage of all Bryan has to offer," said Miller. And best of all, there's a real sense of pride about what this small town has achieved together.

The Bryan Area Foundation consistently hears members of the community commenting on how their downtown is transforming. When you can see change begin to happen and feel the excitement and elevated energy in the air, it inspires others to join in and bring their individual

talents, vision, energy, and financial investment to the table. Amy Miller said, "Our work with Small Nation also inspired community members and organizations to step up and do their own work downtown. Together, we planted a seed that helped people see what was possible in Bryan."

At Small Nation, we are proud of the work we did with the city of Bryan, and the results that have

come from it. We believe *every small town* deserves to experience success, and if there is one key takeaway from our partnership with Bryan, Ohio, it's this: when a community works together towards revitalization, anything is possible.

We are sure the people of Bryan would agree... when it comes to making life sweet, it truly starts with community. Sweet dreams can indeed become reality! All it takes is some new ideas, clarification of a common vision, and the willingness to take action.

“ Our work with Small Nation also inspired community members and organizations to step up and do their own work downtown. We planted a seed that helped people see that more was possible in Bryan. ”

Amy Miller, CEO, Bryan Area Foundation

SMALL NATION develops places, spaces and dreams for small towns and small town entrepreneurs across the country.

**SMALL
NATION**

We're here to show the world that small town and small business success is not only possible, but profitable. For everyone.