



| CASE STUDY |

OHIO'S CHRISTMAS CAPITAL

Stake your claim. Build what you dream.

| CASE STUDY |

OHIO'S CHRISTMAS CAPITAL

Stake your claim. Build what you dream.

How can creative ideas and a strong sense of community turn the holidays into something magical for both businesses and families throughout the region? In Bellefontaine, we set out to answer those questions—and discovered how embracing the spirit of Christmas could bring people together, boost local businesses, and create memories that last a lifetime.

THE JOLLY IDEA

Downtown Bellefontaine has experienced a remarkable revitalization over the past decade, transforming into a place that draws visitors from across the state. With momentum building year-round, Small Nation saw an opportunity to turn Bellefontaine into a must-visit destination for the holiday season. The goal was clear: drive visitation and increase foot traffic for downtown businesses during the critical fourth quarter, while creating unforgettable holiday experiences for families near and far.

What if Bellefontaine could become the Christmas Capital of Ohio? The team knew it would take more than lights and garland to make it happen. It would require thoughtful placemaking, imaginative branding, signature events, photo-worthy backdrops, and strong collaboration between downtown businesses, local government, and community organizations. With a bold idea and a strong team behind it, the vision for Ohio's Christmas Capital was born.

THE SEASON TO "RING REGISTERS"

For the small businesses that make Downtown Bellefontaine such a vibrant, welcoming place, the months of November and December are more than just festive - they're vital.

Across the country, small retailers can generate up to 30% of their annual revenue during the holiday shopping season. And that trend holds true right here at home. From unique gift shops and cozy boutiques to local restaurants and

specialty stores, many of Bellefontaine's small businesses rely on the final two months of the year to sustain them through the quieter seasons.

Black Friday and Small Business Saturday mark the unofficial start of this crucial window. In recent years, these days have become more than just shopping events, they're celebrations of local spirit. Nationwide, shoppers spent nearly \$22 billion on Small Business Saturday alone in 2024, and Bellefontaine has seen its own version of that boost as residents and visitors make it a point to shop small and support local.

Beyond the big days, holiday shopping now starts earlier and lasts longer. Over half of all shoppers begin buying gifts before December, and small retailers who prepare early - with events, promotions, and extended hours - are better positioned to benefit. The foot traffic downtown picks up dramatically in these months, and with more people choosing to shop local for thoughtful, meaningful gifts, Bellefontaine's charming storefronts become a go-to destination.

THE STRATEGY

Small Nation spearheaded the development of a place-based holiday campaign to brand Downtown Bellefontaine as "Ohio's Christmas Capital," along with the Downtown Bellefontaine Partnership. The initiative included physical transformations downtown, an official mayoral proclamation



| SMALL BUSINESS. BIG IMPACT. |

Want to see change real in your downtown? Make a bold declaration. Bellefontaine claimed the title "Ohio's Christmas Capital" before it ever became a reality. By rallying the community, designing unforgettable

experiences, and transforming the downtown into a holiday wonderland, they turned that vision into a magical destination that lived up to its name. Learn more by scanning the QR code.





to earn media attention, and a comprehensive schedule of holiday events to activate the space throughout the season.

The team leaned into placemaking and experience design. Mistletoe Avenue replaced the popular Umbrella Avenue as the go-to photo spot for the season, filled with twinkling lights and a custom-built kissing booth. The Santa Shed, located in front of the historic courthouse, became the center of family traditions. Downtown storefronts joined in with decorated windows and extended hours. Meanwhile, Small Nation built a holiday web guide with a full event calendar and shopping directory to help visitors plan their visit and navigate the downtown.

BECOMING THE CHRISTMAS CAPITAL

With strategic partnerships in place, execution began in early fall. Small Nation worked to build the visual identity for Ohio's Christmas Capital and coordinated with the Downtown Bellefontaine Partnership, Logan County Visitors Bureau, and the City of Bellefontaine to bring the brand to life.

Bellefontaine Mayor David Crissman officially declared the city as Ohio's Christmas Capital on November 25, 2024. The proclamation added credibility to the title and drew press coverage that spread awareness of Bellefontaine's transformation into a winter destination. The team launched the campaign with an updated holiday landing page and downloadable shopping guide that helped direct traffic to small businesses.

Throughout the downtown, Small Nation invested in festive experiences to create a cohesive and magical atmosphere. Mistletoe Avenue featured overhead string lights, decorated trees, and a charming kissing booth. The Santa Shed was staffed every weekend with visits from Santa, creating a family-friendly tradition that encouraged repeat visits. Businesses leaned in with cookie decorating, Christmas trivia nights, dueling pianos, holiday brunches, shopping markets, and more.

A HOLIDAY CALENDAR FOR ALL AGES

With over 25 festive events scheduled throughout November and December, Downtown Bellefontaine offered something for everyone. The season kicked off with the Holiday Open House weekend and the Santa Shed grand opening, setting the tone for weeks of fun and activity.

Key events included the annual Hometown Christmas Parade, Holiday Night Market at the Morning Riot, Brunch with Santa at the Syndicate, and a holiday edition of





Dueling Pianos. Visitors could also enjoy cookie decorating classes, family craft nights, live concerts and theatre performances at the Holland Theatre, carriage rides, trivia nights, and themed bar crawls. The goal was to create a sense of ongoing excitement that would encourage families to return weekend after weekend.

A SPIRITED IMPACT

The results of the campaign were quickly visible. Foot traffic in downtown spiked during weekends in December, with parking lots full and restaurants buzzing. Businesses reported strong holiday sales, often citing new visitors who discovered them through the holiday campaign or event programming.

The sense of community and pride was just as noticeable. Locals embraced the title of Ohio's Christmas Capital, proudly tagging photos and sharing events on social

media. The transformation of the downtown into a magical Christmas setting brought joy and connection at a time when it was needed most. Even nearby communities began taking notice, visiting Bellefontaine as a destination for family fun and Christmas shopping.

Small towns have the ability to create big experiences when they lean into what makes them unique. With creativity, collaboration, and a commitment to community, Bellefontaine turned the holiday season into an economic and cultural driver.

Ohio's Christmas Capital is more than a slogan—it's a movement that brings people together, supports local businesses, and builds lasting memories. By designing experiences around tradition, beauty, and joy, Bellefontaine showed what's possible when you combine vision with action.

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.