

# Dare to be Different

## Companies, Groups Seek New Markets, Opportunities

By Tom Schuman

In today's competitive economic climate, trying to do "business as usual" will likely not deliver the same historical results. An uncommon approach to customary challenges is needed to thrive – and in some cases even survive.

The "try something new" mentality is not limited to the high-tech entrepreneurs and innovators. No matter the industry or the location, business leaders must embrace change in one form or another.

Several companies and organizations in our focus counties are doing just that. Retailers and other enterprises in Ripley County are working to attract business from beyond the typical customer range. In Jennings County, the traditional farmer's market has reached new heights with crops being sold to meet local needs and beyond. And, in Jefferson County, Madison continues to attract attention to its historic community, while one company expands its business base.

### And your destination is ...

In Batesville, best known as the home of Hillenbrand Industries, business owners went to boot camp in Florida earlier this year. They returned home with a concept – destination marketing – that is gaining momentum and energizing the business community.

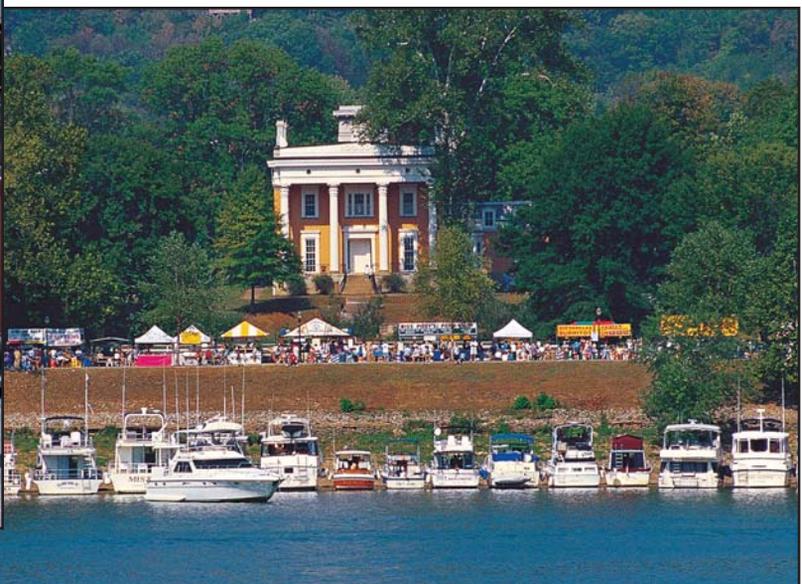
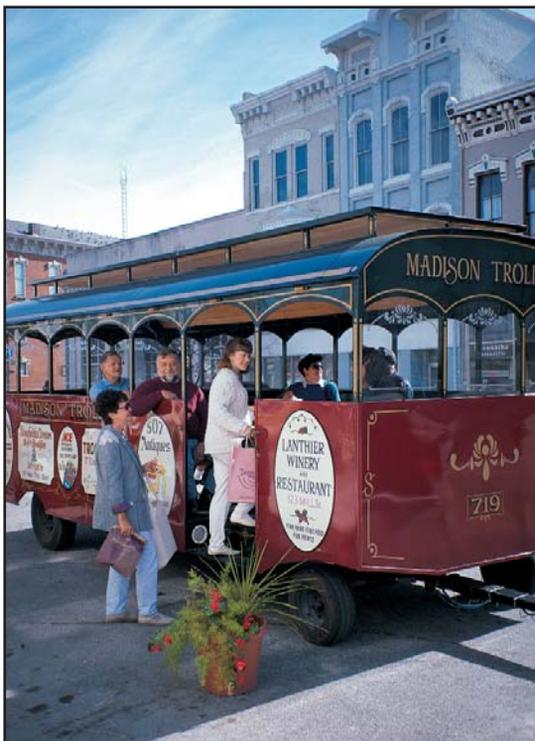
Among the questions asked at marketing guru Jon Schallart's high-intensity seminar was: Why do certain businesses out in the middle of nowhere attract customers from 100 miles away or more? Batesville, situated along Interstate 74 and slightly closer to Cincinnati than Indianapolis, and its nearly 5,000 people are in a rural, but far from isolated, locale. The nine boot camp attendees, representing a variety of small businesses, liked the message they received.

"The things we heard, we didn't want to let that die," says Doug Bessler, owner of Bessler's Trackside Auto Depot. "Just like any other seminar, if you take what you learn and put it on the shelf it doesn't do you any good. We decided to come back, continue to meet and get other people interested."

The Schallart philosophy focuses on businesses developing individually creative ways to attract nontraditional shoppers, as well as working together to brand the area as a true customer destination.

Lydia Woodward, executive director of the Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce, was also a boot camp participant. "We want to bring people in

A downtown trolley and attractions such as the Lanier Mansion help make Madison a popular tourist destination.



from Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Columbus, Connersville to do business here. All the people are changing the way they do business.”

The group stayed together as a local chamber committee and is now known as Destination Business Partners. The number of attendees at the last meeting doubled from the original group, with a follow-up visit to Ripley County by Schallart drawing the interest of more than 60 people, who paid a nominal fee to attend.

## Sending a message

Bessler recounts some of the lessons learned and implementation steps he has taken:

- “It’s important how people perceive your business when they drive up. Schallart emphasized most people tend to look toward the right when they walk in, so it’s important to have a prominent wall or something to get their attention.”
- An enhanced database that can be critical to future sales. Tracking customers by car models, makes and prices can lead to increased in-person and Internet sales.
- A holiday promotion in which \$100 for every vehicle sold was donated toward the renovation of an area women’s shelter. Not only was the company giving back to the community, but “we received more compliments from that than anything else we have done.”

Web site improvements – strong testimonials, directions from cities such as St. Louis and Detroit that boost the perception of the company’s reach – are a way to help attract the customers from beyond the normal range. Product and customer service, of course, play their usual critical role.

Earlier this year, a man from St. Cloud, Minnesota, saw a car on the Bessler web site that he had been searching for. He traveled 721 miles, picked the car up on a Saturday morning and drove it back home.

“There were probably 500 of those cars between St. Cloud and Batesville,” Bessler recalls. “He talked to myself and two other associates on the phone. He said we were so nice and helpful, and that’s why he came here to buy the car.”

## Business partners

Bruce Talbott, general manager of Taff Furniture, shares Bessler’s enthusiasm for the marketing approach. In his recently completed term as president of the local chamber, an emphasis was “getting local retailers and businesses together and trading with each other. A lot of people in towns our size think everybody is the competition. We need to work together and show people how much there is once they come to Batesville.”

Talbott and the owner of a local electronics store (another boot camp disciple) have established a strong partnership. A large screen television accompanies Taff’s Home Theater by Lazy Boy furniture arrangement, with Talbott providing the furniture for a similar display in the electronics store.

Plans are under way for the retailers and others to advertise as a group in various outlying markets. The brainstorming and bouncing ideas off each other in current meetings is proving invaluable.

Once customers are in the store, Talbott is confident service will bring them back. “Being a smaller dealer, we’re more hands-on. As owner, I’m on the sales floor daily making customers feel special.”

Both Talbott and Bessler anticipate a few successes will bring more of their business allies to the group. Some not involved now, they say, may be unclear about the effort and the goals.

“Hopefully we’ll keep the momentum going, accomplish some things and people will say ‘I’ve got to be involved,’” Talbott declares. What he wants fellow business owners and managers to ask, Bessler adds, is “What am I missing? Curiosity will get the best of them.”

Bessler says the boot camp and follow-up meeting closed with a Jerry Garcia quote that sticks with him.

“You don’t want to be considered one of the best at what you do. You want to be the only one who does what you do.” In other words, be the best.



**Doug Bessler looks to bring other owners and managers into the Destination Business Partners group.**



**Bruce Talbott is convinced that innovative marketing and customer service will bring new business to Batesville’s Taff Furniture.**



**The Jennings County Farmers Market provides an outlet for area growers to sell their products three times a week.**

## Peddling produce products

Travel to any number of rural communities in Indiana on a Saturday morning or selected other days and you're likely to find farmers and others selling what they have grown. The farmer's market is a Hoosier tradition.

The Jennings County Farm Bureau entered that arena recently – in 1998 – but the formation of the Jennings County Growers Cooperative a few years later has expanded the program's reach and impact. Some of the results are a guide for all Indiana growers on how to prepare their fruits and vegetables for sale, an agreement with the MCL Cafeterias restaurant chain to use the vegetable products of co-op members and sales of meats year-round to business customers.

"The Farm Bureau just wanted to provide an opportunity for people to come and sell at a central point, and for the rest of the community to come and buy," states Bud Beesley, a farmer who says he now spends more time traveling and in meetings than in the fields. "People in town come and sell things, like a dozen tomato plants. We don't charge anyone to come in and sell."

A shelter in City Park is home to the Jennings County Farmer's Market, open 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. During peak season, 30 or more growers will show up with as many as 400 to 500 customers in the five-hour period. The variety – many different types of sweet corn, tomatoes, bell peppers and other produce – brings growers and customers from surrounding counties.

The cooperative also aids in education projects. The use of hoop houses (coverings that help extend the growing season) has proven beneficial. More than 20 different types of lettuce were kept alive during the winter, while growers can have tomatoes on the market a month earlier than normal.

"We're trying to show growers the opportunities in niche markets," explains Beesley, citing schools, hospitals and jails as potential customers if products are processed properly. "It's also an opportunity to teach people how to sell. One of the hardest things to do is teach an old farmer how to sell a quart of strawberries when he's used to giving them away."

The local market concept offers assistance to small farmers. "It's supplemental income. People have patches of ground around everywhere where they're growing things. We have to make use of what we've got to work with," Beesley theorizes.

He adds that there are probably no more than a dozen full-time farmers left in the county, with those farmers working at least several thousand acres to be able to make a living. The cooperative can be beneficial for them and others throughout the state, if the hurdles to co-op creation can be overcome.

A United States Department of Agriculture grant to Purdue University is being utilized to help make the process more efficient. State agencies need to do a better job of working together, Beesley claims, and Indiana professional expertise must be found and made available. The Jennings County cooperative, along with two others formed in the state, all went to the same attorney in Minnesota to assist in establishing organizational by-laws.

Nevertheless, Beesley has been working with Bloomington officials and expects to see the development of a strong cooperative in that city. In the meantime, Jennings County will continue to import the customers and export the produce to assist its farmers.

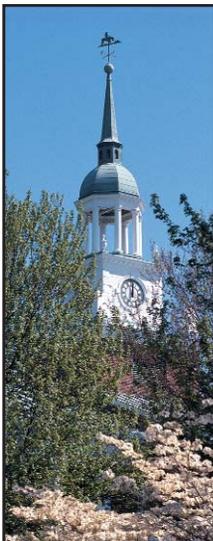
## It's here; they will come

Madison has a more traditional tourism approach to attracting visitors. A total of 133 blocks in the city along the Ohio River are on the National Register of Historic Places. The downtown is landlocked, sending new development to the expanding hilltop area.

The community attracts 350,000 visitors a year. More than 40,000 people passed through the Madison Area Convention and Visitors Bureau in 2003, the largest total in the state, according to executive director Linda Lytle.

"Downtown is a great place to walk. We've got three wineries and the artist community just

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## Jefferson County

(State ranks in parentheses)

Population (1990) 29,797 (49)  
 Population (2002) 32,113 (51)  
 Population (2010 projected) 33,293 (49)

Adults (25+ in 2000 census) 20,605 (49)  
 Adults with high school diploma or higher 81% (43)  
 Adults with B.A. or higher degree 16.4% (20)

Per capita personal income (2001) \$22,613 (67)  
 Median household income (2000) \$38,189 (59)

### Cities and Towns

#### 2002 Population

Madison – 12,126  
 Hanover – 3,844  
 Dupont – 394  
 Brooksbury – 73

### Commuting Patterns (2002)

	Number	Percent
Into Jefferson County	3,331	16.0%
From Clark County	775	3.7%
From Floyd County	492	2.4%
From Kentucky	404	1.9%
From Scott County	346	1.7%
From Switzerland County	315	1.5%
Out of Jefferson County	3,256	15.7%
To Kentucky	1,148	5.5%
To Jennings County	345	1.7%
To Scott County	318	1.5%
To Clark County	198	1.0%
To Jackson County	191	0.9%



## Jennings County

(State ranks in parentheses)

Population (1990) 23,661 (62)  
 Population (2002) 28,192 (55)  
 Population (2010 projected) 30,547 (54)

Adults (25+ in 2000 census) 17,709 (57)  
 Adults with high school diploma or higher 76.2% (77)  
 Adults with B.A. or higher degree 8.4% (87)

Per capita personal income (2001) \$21,279 (79)  
 Median household income (2000) \$39,402 (50)

### Cities and Towns

#### 2002 Population

North Vernon – 6,421  
 Vernon – 322

### Commuting Patterns (2002)

	Number	Percent
Into Jennings County	1,610	11.2%
From Jefferson County	345	2.4%
From Jackson County	319	2.2%
From Bartholomew County	241	1.7%
From Ripley County	190	1.3%
From Decatur County	150	1.0%
Out of Jennings County	5,481	30.1%
To Bartholomew County	2,702	14.9%
To Jackson County	1,561	8.6%
To Jefferson County	251	1.4%
To Marion County	235	1.3%
To Decatur County	195	1.1%



## Ripley County

(State ranks in parentheses)

Population (1990) 24,616 (60)  
 Population (2002) 27,525 (58)  
 Population (2010 projected) 28,324 (57)

Adults (25+ in 2000 census) 17,027 (62)  
 Adults with high school diploma or higher 78.9% (70)  
 Adults with B.A. or higher degree 11.5% (58)

Per capita personal income (2001) \$27,531 (19)  
 Median household income (2000) \$41,426 (37)

### Cities and Towns

#### 2002 Population

Batesville – 4,957  
 Milan – 1,840  
 Versailles – 1,808  
 Osgood – 1,692  
 Sunman – 820  
 Holton – 417  
 Napoleon – 242

### Commuting Patterns (2002)

	Number	Percent
Into Ripley County	4,045	23.4%
From Franklin County	1,728	10.0%
From Dearborn County	1,016	5.9%
From Decatur County	547	3.2%
From Jefferson County	81	0.5%
From Switzerland County	79	0.5%
Out of Ripley County	5,351	28.7%
To Ohio (state)	1,264	6.8%
To Decatur County	1,220	6.5%
To Dearborn County	1,006	5.4%
To Franklin County	311	1.7%
To Kentucky	264	1.4%

Hanover College (top), Walnut Grove one-room school in North Vernon (middle) and water rushing down the dam at Versailles State Park.

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## New Markets, Opportunities

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keeps growing," she extols. "We've been lucky that most of our businesses in the downtown area relate to tourists. It helps that the businesses are as compact as they are."

Antiques, specialty shops and 19th century architecture add to the attraction, along with a revitalized riverfront. If received, an applied-for national landmark designation would make the area the largest landmark district in the country, Lytle says. The already strong heritage traveler tourism trade would receive another boost.

The bureau concentrates its marketing efforts on Indiana and surrounding states within driving distance, with Cincinnati a particularly strong market. Visitors come from beyond the region, however, some arriving each summer on the Delta Queen boat that travels up and down the Ohio.

Even when you have natural advantages, it doesn't hurt to be lucky. The former *Chicago Hope* television series filmed a bicycling scene a few years ago between Vevay and Madison. "That gave us even more fuel to attract bikers," Lytle says.

### Swizzle sticks to basketball

Manufacturing also fuels the Madison economy. Metals, chemicals, automotive and tooling products are among the goods produced. Among the less traditional companies is Royer Corporation, a plastics manufacturer specializing in customized swizzle sticks, cocktail stirrs and similar products. The company, however, is constantly expanding its inventory and looking for new opportunities.

Diversification has come in the form of license plate frames for automobile dealers, name badges, steak and meat markers, ice scrapers and more. On the horizon is an entry into the game business.

Roger Williams explains the company beginnings and the future outlook.

Using a homemade injection molding device, Roger Royer would make small stirrs in his basement before the company officially formed in 1977. An early break was when he had a quote out to Harrah's casino in Las Vegas. Harrah's advanced half the money on the purchase order, has been a customer ever since and Royer's business took off.

"That's still our core business," Williams asserts. "We're always looking for opportunities. What you have to be careful with is you can't lose track of that core business, and that part is still growing."

Royer designs, manufactures and ships its products. Its 40 employees on two shifts enjoy a strong variety with the vast product field.

"Everything is custom manufacturing. The different designs make it more interesting," Williams says. Other than the license plate frames, everything is direct to the end user. We have a good on-time shipping record. We've won a lot of business when our competition has fumbled here and there."

Fumbling is most closely associated with football. But it's basketball that has the attention of Williams and the Royer team. The company has purchased the rights to the Spot-a-Shot™ basketball game of Madison inventor Michael Montgomery, who has made several thousand in his basement.

Legendary college basketball coaches Bob Knight and Denny Crum are among those who have received the game from Montgomery and offered their endorsement. Royer has made a significant investment in the product, with Williams enthusiastic about the outcome.

"It's a board game played with dice, very unique. I bought one for Christmas and thought this was really clever," he explains. "We assembled a team, researched it and found nothing on the market like it. It's fast, fun and competitive. I think it's going to be a big hit."

Royer hopes to have the games on the shelves later this year. Williams realizes the risk, but believes the product and the popularity of basketball in Indiana and surrounding states will lead to success.

And the company will continue to look for additional ways to expand its interests and customer base. Just like many businesses must do on a continual basis.

#### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources:** Doug Bessler, Bessler's Trackside Auto Depot, at (812) 934-4923

**Bruce Talbott, Taff Furniture, at (812) 934-4112**

**Bud Beesley, Jennings County Growers Cooperative, at (812) 346-3455**

**Linda Lytle, Madison Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, at (812) 265-2956**

**Roger Williams, Royer Corporation, at (812) 265-3133**