

Historic Water Town

An Atlas Community Studios Marketing Playbook

FOR THE BOROUGH OF CAMBRIDGE SPRINGS



Atlas

ABOUT

Atlas Community Studios was founded in 2020 by a small, diverse group of creative problem-solvers and entrepreneurs looking for the opportunity to advance the economic prosperity of small and rural communities across the country. With decades of combined experience spanning both the public and private sectors, the Atlas team specializes in strategic planning, economic development, and creative placemaking. Atlas Community Studios helps communities plan for development and growth through collaborative strategic planning and simple-to-execute, realistic plans. We are connectors who find the right people, the right resources, and the right places and bring them together to help transform communities of all sizes.

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Overview

Overview

A brand is a perception. It is what people think of you, not just what you say you are. The point of branding is to create an emotional connection, and the most successful brands are informed by community input and confirmed by feasibility. A key factor for assessing feasibility is determining what is unique about your community. The key findings from the public input distinguish the following Cambridge Springs assets as notable:

Rich history around water

When Dr. John Gray first searched for oil on his farm, he was disappointed to find water. After a visit to Hot Springs, Arkansas, with a patient, he realized the water he found might also be the cure to several ailments. Wealthy individuals flocked to town to reap the mineral springs' health benefits, and more than forty inns and spas were in operation to meet demand. [In 1897, the town was renamed Cambridge Springs after becoming known for its mineral springs.](#)

French Creek running through town

Located along the upper French Creek Water Trail, Cambridge Springs benefits from this body of water running through town. Its presence is hard to miss, and while it provides recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike, it also serves as a reminder of the town's unique history.

Welcoming, small-town culture and feel

One of the most common responses from the public input survey noted how welcoming and close-knit the Cambridge Springs community feels. After the loss of Riverside Inn from a fire in May 2017, the borough was devastated, but the people came together to support one another and ensure that the history lives on.

The following pages in this playbook will use the above assets to outline a targeted marketing campaign, starting first by identifying the goals and potential target audiences. We will also outline more details about the internal and external campaigns and ideas for implementation success.



Goals

GOALS

The goals of this playbook and the Historic Water Town Campaign are two-fold. Internally, the campaign seeks to establish an identity for the borough and encourage teen involvement within the community. Externally, the campaign aims to support tourism development by leveraging the unique history and assets of Cambridge Springs.

Community Identity

While people may no longer be flocking to the town to reap the mineral springs' benefits, the community still has a deep connection to water with the French Creek. Atlas believes Cambridge Springs can leverage this asset to celebrate its history and make the connection to establish itself in the present day as a historic water town, giving the community a unique identity and its residents a sense of pride and belonging to something meaningful.

Teen Engagement

One of the most frequent comments we heard from the public input and steering committee feedback was the lack of opportunities for involvement for the teen and young-adult community. To that end, [part of this playbook](#) will illustrate how Cambridge Springs can encourage teen involvement in this campaign, which will be essential for spurring their excitement and appreciation for the town and the community's future growth.

Tourism Development

The [VisitPA](#) and [VisitCrawford](#) tourism websites are well-designed and serve as excellent starting points when researching Cambridge Springs' tourism opportunities. However, they are just that—starting points. With little focus on Cambridge Springs specifically, a pretty significant gap exists, and it's hard to understand why one should consider it a destination.

A more cohesive effort that paints Cambridge Springs as an exciting and welcoming place will help bolster the tourism economy. Increasing tourism to the area will be achieved through this marketing campaign and in creating a Cambridge Springs-specific tourism website. You can find more information on this site and how it can work alongside the marketing campaign [here](#).

TARGET

Audiences



TARGET AUDIENCES

Critical to any marketing campaign is the understanding of who the target audiences should be. Atlas has identified the following groups of individuals who we believe will be the most receptive to the messaging and take action to visit.

"Outdoor recreationists"

This group encompasses a wide range of people, including:

- French Creek or water enthusiasts
- Conservationists
- Campers and daytrippers

These three groups have a deep passion for and connection to the outdoors, as their names would suggest. Cambridge Springs' location along the French Creek Water Trail is a valuable asset to tourism because of 1) its proximity to the water and 2) the recreational opportunity. This group is likely seeking some sort of adventure, with the chance to slow down and enjoy the land's natural beauty.

Families looking for a place to vacation

Families want adventure too! Not only can a vacation be stress-relieving for the busy parent, but it is also an opportunity for the family to bond with one another and create memories that can impact a child's future development.

The family will be looking for activities for both the parents and children to enjoy. The borough can use the water and its vibrant history to entice families to visit, but its welcoming environment, local shops and restaurants, and various other amenities will make for a well-rounded vacation.

"The History Buff"

Because of its history connected to the mineral springs, a historical marker was erected in the borough in 2001 by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Several other markers exist within the borough, including ones for Alliance College, William D. Rider, and the Grant Street Bridge, just to name a few. Historical markers aside, Cambridge Springs also has several other meaningful attractions that will appeal to the "history buff."



THE
Campaign

THE Campaign

We can dive deeper into the campaign strategy's specifics with both the goals and the target audiences now identified.

As previously mentioned, Cambridge Springs has a solid link to water through the mineral springs and the healing properties visitors believed them to possess. Public input and steering committee feedback noted the value of French Creek running through town.

While Cambridge Springs may no longer be a health spa town, it is still very much a water town with health benefits by way of outdoor recreation, a rich history, and a variety of amenities to boot. Cambridge Springs can draw the identified target audiences to the area by leveraging its assets and showcasing itself as a water town with so much more to explore.

INTERNAL STRATEGY

As a reminder, the internal strategy aims to establish an identity for the community.

No longer a booming spa town, Cambridge Springs has had to redefine itself once then and again after the Riverside Inn fire. Cambridge Springs lost a significant component of the town's history, and tourism draw in that fire, but that is no reason to forget and move forward. Those memories will always remain.

The internal strategy should embrace the water history and celebrate the town's resiliency and its continued connection to water by way of French Creek.

Some ideas to engage residents include:

- Creating a community "scrapbook" that would give residents the chance to share their favorite memories about the town, possibly as they relate to the Riverside Inn! This scrapbook can be printed and distributed to visitors or translated online to be easily shared.

- Introducing an annual event that celebrates the history and embraces the present-day. Some components of this event could be:
 - A historical marker walking tour
 - A wax museum that encourages residents to take on the role of pivotal characters throughout history, such as Dr. John Gray or William Rider, to tell the story.
 - Kayak or canoe races
- Ask residents to leave positive reviews of their favorite shops and restaurants on Google Maps, Yelp, and Facebook. Doing so will also support the external strategy because these are the resources used most frequently by travelers looking for places to stop, and a little positive buzz can go a long way!

The internal strategy will also be supported by other projects identified as part of the [greater placemaking effort](#) like downtown revitalization and the public art plan. As new art and wayfinding are introduced throughout the borough and spaces are activated for better use, residents will enjoy more fabulous amenities and a more vibrant place to celebrate.

EXTERNAL STRATEGY: LEVERAGING ASSETS

Benefits of Water and Outdoor Recreation

Water is a vital part of our lives since we need it to survive! People are naturally drawn to water for various reasons, but one of the major drivers is the recreational opportunity.

Cambridge Springs is unique because it is one of the few communities with the French Creek running through the middle of town. For a town that was “put on the map” because of its water features in the late 1800s - early 1900s, it is invaluable that it still has this water connection. Tell the story of Cambridge Springs as the “Then and Now.” Once a town that attracted elites for water’s healing powers, Cambridge is now a town that welcomes all and is still home to a cool water feature that provides [healing benefits through outdoor activity](#).

Ecotourism is tourism focused on an environmentally-friendly experience for tourists. [It means responsible travel to natural areas, conserving the environment, and improving the local people's well-being. Some experts now estimate that ecotourism now represents 11.4% of all consumer spending.](#) French Creek is home to [27 species of mussels, 15 species of darters, and four nationally designated Important Bird Areas \(IBA\).](#) The French Creek Conservancy works hard to protect the land and the natural environment. People want to go where they can enjoy the land and learn from the people that live there.

When people come to town, they will also be able to take advantage of two canoe/kayak launches—one in Firemen's Park downtown and another on Miller Station Road. The introduction of a canoe/kayak rental will also encourage the use of these areas.

History Worth Talking About

If you couldn't already tell, Cambridge Springs' history is a story worth telling, but the borough is more than just its connection to water.

There is also a rich history associated with William Rider and the Rider Hotel, a famous chess tournament, Alliance College, and Leon Ray Livingston, a prominent "hobo" and author who made Cambridge Springs his home for some time. He described the town in his book *The Ways of a Hobo* as an ["idyllic," "delightful," and "charming" summer resort town known for "the medicinal properties of its numberless gushing springs."](#)

The varied history will appeal to many groups of people! The Cambridge Springs Museum and History Center is home to several displays and abundant documentation of its history and the mineral springs industry. Visitors may come for a tour or to do their research. Not every town has a resource this valuable.

More to Explore

Cambridge Springs will need more than just French Creek to attract and retain visitors. It's also essential to have appropriate lodging, retail, restaurants,

and other attractions. Luckily, the borough has all of these things, and improvements to some of these areas are included in the larger placemaking plan. People should come for the water and stay for the shops, restaurants, and other attractions!

Local shops and restaurants

Perhaps one of the best new additions to Cambridge Springs is Riverside Brewery. Riverside Brewery is housed in an 1800s barn that existed in Cochran, PA, that was deconstructed and rebuilt on the former Riverside Inn site in Cambridge Springs. In addition to Riverside Brewery, Cambridge Springs is home to several unique local shops like the Campbell Pottery Store and Earth, Wind and Wire Studio and Rock Shop, and local restaurants like Brown's Olde Tyme Cafe and Mr. Woody's Smokin' Bar-B-Que.

Visitors are sure to enjoy the charm of these local treasures.

Events

Events can act as their own catalysts for tourism by attracting people to the area specifically for the event. Cambridge Springs is home to a host of its own events that can be used to entice visitors, including:

- Winter Blues Bluegrass Festival
- French Creek Music Fest
- Fall on French Creek Foliage Festival
- French Creek Summer Art Series

Riverside Brewery also hosts a number of its own events from time to time. Cambridge Springs should promote these events beyond the community.

TEEN
Connection

TEEN CONNECTION

Something we hear a lot from the communities we work with is that there is nothing to do for young people, and because of this, they often feel excluded from the community as a whole.

However, teens and young adults are a vital asset and age group among any community. They are the “leaders of tomorrow” and the ones that will carry on the town’s legacy. If Cambridge Springs hopes to grow and continue being a welcoming community, young people need to be a part of the conversations that will shape the borough’s future.

For these reasons, Atlas recommends forming a street team composed of teens and young adults who will lead a coordinated effort to get other young individuals excited about all things happening in Cambridge Springs. Allowing them the chance to take ownership over part of the campaign will afford them the power to see change and build the place they want to be a part of for years to come.

Using this campaign as a springboard, the street team may (the list is nonexhaustive):

- Spread the word and build excitement about the new campaign.
- Manage a social media account dedicated to the campaign.
- Distribute “swag,” flyers, or other materials to promote events or other
- Recruit other members to the team. These individuals are likely looking for more ways to get involved with the community and make a difference.
- Plan monthly meetings. Meetings can take the form of a meet-and-greet or just a meeting of the minds to brainstorm ideas about what they hope to see in an evolving Cambridge Springs.

This street team will be beneficial for all those involved. Members can form relationships with peers as well as role models such as city officials and business leaders. They may also develop valuable life skills such as collaboration, leadership, and public speaking.

Of course, the community as a whole will reap the benefits as well. Giving

young people a voice is crucial to community development, and it signals a willingness to evolve. A place that welcomes and includes all voices is undoubtedly one that people will want to call home.



BEST
Practices

BEST Practices

In this final section, you'll find valuable information for the implementation of this campaign. Atlas recommends the following "best practices" to consider:

- Engage "influencers" as part of the external strategy
- Establish a committee to oversee the campaign
- Create social media accounts tailored to this campaign
- Use social media advertising.
- Use the Cambridge Springs tourism website to support this campaign and future tourism efforts.

Engage Influencers

For better or worse, social media has become a relatively integral part of our lives because it allows us to quickly and easily share information and connect with others across states or countries. With the rise of social media, we have also seen the rise of social media "influencers" who are essentially compensated for sharing their review (or some other specific content) with their dedicated online following.

These individuals are typically experts in some sort of niche market, such as fashion or food. Cambridge Springs can employ a similar tactic and invite influencers who closely align with the identified target audiences to town. In exchange for an honest review of their experience, highlighting places such as Riverside Brewery and French Creek, the borough should consider some form of compensation and paid-for expenses or gift cards to local businesses.

People to consider include:

- Professional kayakers or canoers
- Environmentalists
- People who live and travel by car/van/camper
- Triathletes who enjoy the water
- History podcasters or professors
- Family Bloggers

The critical thing to remember is that these individuals do not need to be celebrities or "famous." Their input/opinion is valuable because the following

they have built trusts them.

Establish a committee to oversee the campaign

Atlas recommends that a committee be formed to oversee the campaign. This committee should be diverse in backgrounds and perspectives, but this committee must have a strong vested interest in this campaign's success.

The committee will be in charge of a variety of responsibilities including, but not limited to:

- Making critical decisions related to budget, graphics, messaging, etc.
- Establishing performance indicators
- Evaluating performance
- Adapting or modifying the strategy when appropriate

This playbook serves as a reference or starting point, but as Cambridge Springs grows and new ideas take shape, the committee should consider modifying the playbook to stay relevant.

Create social media accounts tailored to this campaign

Once the committee is in place, Atlas recommends creating social media pages or a website specific to this new campaign. Doing so will allow the community at large to stay up-to-date and involved with the campaign. Additionally, this will help bolster the internal strategy, which aims to garner awareness and support for the project.

As was mentioned in the previous section, "[Teen Connection](#)," the street team can take ownership of this component.

Use social media for advertising

In addition to using social media to engage with influencers and the community, social media is also a valuable resource for advertising, helping reach the potential target audiences.

Targeting

Platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram have powerful advertising tools that allow for targeting based on parameters such as age, location, interests, job, life events, and other social and demographic indicators.

Atlas recommends creating a campaign with at least three target audiences that align with the ones already described in this playbook. Examples include but are not limited to :

- People who enjoy the outdoors, such as camping, hiking, and kayaking
- People likely to be parents
- People interested in history

Other audiences or "AND" parameters can be included to define each audience further. Other considerations for targeting include but are not limited to :

- People who "like" travel or adventure
- People located within 100 miles of Cambridge Springs
- People who like beer

Schedule and Budget

Ads can also run (or not run) during specific times of the day, such as during the lunch hour, in the evening after dinner, or at 3 a.m. (when traffic may be lower). However, it's essential to keep in mind that defining these times too precisely may limit the reach and overall performance.

It will be up to the committee to determine the budget for social media advertising. In most cases, the cost is determined on a per-click basis, making it a cost-effective method. The average click-through-rate for Facebook is 0.99%, which may seem low. Still, when put into perspective, a couple of thousands of people who may be interested in visiting or moving to the community are pretty significant.



The advantage of using social media as a marketing tool is that there is room for constant evaluation. Messages, graphics, budget, and schedule can all change at any point in time. This ensures the money is spent appropriately, and effort has not gone to waste.

The Cambridge Springs Tourism Website

As was mentioned previously, state and county websites exist to support tourism efforts within the region. However, because these sites cover such a large area, it's easy for Cambridge Springs to get lost in the mix. So, an additional component of the placemaking action plan includes a tourism-focused website specifically for Cambridge Springs. This website will support this campaign by providing people a place to visit online to gather information about the town and the things to do.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Cambridge Springs benefits from a rich history surrounding water and present-day proximity to the French Creek. Unbeknownst to many, Cambridge Springs is also home to other attractions and unique local shops and restaurants. If the community hopes to grow and support tourism, they need to share what's impressive with the rest of the world. Sometimes it just takes a new perspective and a coordinated effort to do this.

The Historic Water Town campaign celebrates the community's people and its history and leverages its unique assets. With the proper ownership and attention to implementation, the Historic Water Town campaign will establish a fresh identity as "a water town and more" and propel Cambridge Springs in the right direction as they look to the future and continue to grow.

