



Trends Analysis & Commentary

2012 signals a renewed focus on women and the arts

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As 2012 begins, industry leaders suggest two important trends that will shape downtown marketing in the year ahead. First is the shifting demographic trend that points to the importance of marketing to women and families, and second is the rise of the arts as a driver for economic development.

"One of the things that I'm seeing emerge on the demographic side is everyone's increasing understanding of the importance of targeting young professionals who are seeking destinations prior to employment, and who have the ability to be more mobile, and of baby boomers who are seeking lifestyles in urban centers," says David Downey, the president of the International Downtown Association (IDA).

But more than just young professionals, Downey singles out women as holding the key to revitalization in many areas. As he notes, "Research indicates that women will soon outpace men in the workforce, which suggests there will be an advantage to our appealing to the women professionals' audience, not only with employment opportunities, but services, environment, and arts and cultural offerings. This is not something that will shift in a single year, but downtowns should begin planning for what needs to occur. Focusing on this and understanding it will be critical for downtown success."

Some downtown organizations are ahead of the curve on this trend. Ben Donsky, vice president of management and operations for the Chelsea Improvement Company, says that they have been designing with women in mind for some time.

"We've always believed that if you want to have a great public realm, you have to appeal to women, and you have to send cues that spaces are safe and clean. Women are more sensitive to disorder in general. When we visit existing space, we count how many women are there, and how many men. If it's close to 50/50, we know it's unlikely that there's a crime problem in this park, but if it is 80-90 percent men, we try to get out pretty quickly."

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