

Detroit to Launch an Expensive Comeback Campaign

One of the toughest and probably the almost impossible undertakings is getting to convince top business executives to hold their company meetings and conventions in Detroit as a comeback city. However, the senior VP for sales and marketing at the Detroit Convention & Visitors Bureau, Bill Bohde, has set out on a massive marketing campaign that is set to cost \$1.6 million dollars for a city that could be the largest to enter bankruptcy.



Bohde had a difficult time trying to win over some top business leaders to buy into the idea that the filing of bankruptcy on July 18th did not affect the city's current development projects.

Detroit was once an enviable manufacturing powerhouse and but last fifty years has seen it lose close to a million of its population and several tens of thousands of jobs, and now it is only a few feet shy of being insolvent. Several of its neighborhoods are faced with collapse and the level of violent crime has reached alarming levels.

Despite this, downtown Detroit still has some life left in it thanks to the three casinos and some sports stadiums which are still home to many visitors and residents. Renovations amounting to \$30 million are being done at the downtown Marriot hotel and another one costing \$300 million is being finalized at the Cobo conventional center, which usually hosts the North American International Auto Show.



Ads worth \$600,000 that seek to restore the glory of Detroit have been funded by several businesses and have already appeared in several publications including The New York Times and The Washington Post in full page. This, however, has not done much to cover for the dirty laundry that is already in open air for all and sundry.

Jennifer Barbee who is a tourism development consultant based in Texas is of the opinion that even though the campaign is a smart move, it will not do much for now because the whole country already knows what is going on and this jeopardizes everything.

Detroit was taken over by the state in March after hiring Kevin Orr to be the emergency manager. Kevin Orr, who is a turnaround expert, has put the city's debt standing at a staggering \$18 billion. Due to its continued defaulting on payment of bonds, Detroit may have to sell off some of its assets in order to settle with its creditors.

The Convention Bureau's President, Larry Alexander, said that the bankruptcy news brought people close to them and therefore they found an opportunity to explain to them what was really happening. He said people have to understand that the bankruptcy had no other impact on the city's tourism although the financial problems have to be addressed.

The CEO of American Society of Association Executives, John Graham said most cities they have visited have more of the same problems faced by Detroit and that only a handful of its members have been concerned with the Detroit situation. He also opined that Detroit just got more airtime in the press.



The cities hosting the annual conventions are expected to raise funds that will cater for about 5000 people and Detroit is said to have raised about \$3 million and is expected to earn over \$17 million. In addition to that, hotel and transport costs can be reduced.

The Great Lakes sales executive for AngelTrax, based in Alabama, Dave Breslin, said he would prefer Detroit to Chicago for ease of access since traffic in Chicago is overwhelming. He said what is happening in Detroit at the moment is just unfortunate.

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