

## Downtown Dallas, Inc.

### INNOVATION

For five years, downtown Dallas, Inc. (DDI) has sponsored Unbranded, an innovative and exciting holiday pop-up retail shop, offering a unique Christmas shopping experience and diverse retail options for downtown Dallas residents, workers, and visitors. DDI curates a group of local entrepreneurs, designers, and artists and offers them free retail space from which they can sell their goods or services. Unbranded serves as a retail incubator, providing these small – and often online-only – businesses the opportunity to test sales and organizational capacity in a physical setting before committing to opening or expanding into a brick-and-mortar storefront, either in downtown or elsewhere. DDI hosts Unbranded in a vacant downtown Dallas storefront in an effort to (re) activate the unused ground-floor space throughout the holiday season. Vacant storefronts are a critical impediment in creating an active, vibrant pedestrian experience in downtown Dallas, but Unbranded – through holiday décor, window displays, craft workshops, and happy hours (in addition to the shopping) – has reinvigorated oft-neglected and underutilized portions of downtown Dallas in recent years. The long-term goal of Unbranded is to prove to local developers, property owners, and the commercial real estate community that non-luxury retail is a viable, sustainable activity in downtown Dallas, that is supported by a diverse customer base – all accomplished by assisting the growth and stability of small, local businesses and reactivating underutilized spaces and storefronts throughout downtown Dallas.

### OUTCOME

In 2018, DDI brought along Pegasus City Brewery (PCB), a local craft beer outlet, as a new sponsor for Unbranded, providing beverages for each weekly happy hour. Each time PCB owners delivered their product to Unbranded, they fell more in love with the space in which the pop-up shop was being hosted – a grand Art Deco storefront in an historic mixed-use high-rise – and realized a satellite micro-brewery in downtown Dallas could soon become a reality, filling a critical gap in the neighborhood’s food and beverage offerings. In 2019, DDI brokered a meeting between the landlord and PCB in which a deal was made to open a micro-brewery and beer garden (the first in downtown) in the space vacated years prior by a men’s retail outlet. Before PCB commenced construction on its new brewery, the 2019 iteration of Unbranded was held for its third and final time in the newly-leased space; the once-vacant storefront will no longer be inactive as PCB is set to open their downtown Dallas micro-brewery in summer 2020. In addition to this reactivated storefront, Unbranded has helped three vendors establish themselves in physical storefronts throughout Dallas, proving brick-and-mortar retail is a still-viable option for local consumers. In its five years, Unbranded has supported an average of 40 vendors each year, reaching over 1,500 customers every week. As Unbranded continues to grow, DDI is investigating ways in which the pop-up can be hosted year-round – albeit in a new downtown Dallas location.

### EXECUTION

DDI staff works each year to identify potential locations in which to host Unbranded, looking for ground-floor, finished-out storefronts with ample space to contain multiple vendors at once; reduced or free rent is also necessary. Once DDI has identified a location, a lease agreement with the landlord is executed. DDI selects vendors from a pool of applications each year, solidifies sponsorships, and decorates the space. Vendors move in and the pop-up opens to the public. The near-perfect execution of Unbranded in recent years has created new partnerships and ventures not before seen in downtown. Once PCB determined the downtown micro-brewery feasible for the former Unbranded space, DDI brokered a meeting with the landlord and lease terms were negotiated between the two parties. Throughout 2019, DDI staff assisted PCB in navigating City Hall and its bureaucratic processes to obtain the necessary permits to begin construction of their new brewery. Regulatory processes took longer than expected so PCB allowed Unbranded to open in their newly-leased space – in a partnership to advertise and market their forthcoming venture to a new customer base. Once Unbranded closed, construction on the micro-brewery commenced in haste, with a target opening date for summer 2020.

## REPRESENTATION

Unbranded is meant to be a retail experience for everyone. From a diverse pool of applications each year, DDI staff selects a highly-curated group of vendors to appeal to a large and varied customer base. Among the local boutiques, children's apparel and toys, and candles and other home goods, Unbranded's other unique offerings over the years have included Latin American textiles, Laotian beef jerky, loose-leaf teas from war-torn nations, and Japanese bowties. The Dallas artist community has also been well-represented at Unbranded, with artisans selling artwork in a variety of mediums, including watercolors, textiles, paper products, and lettering. Vendors are changed out each week of Unbranded's run, allowing more small businesses to participate and exposing customers to new shopping experiences throughout the holiday season. Unbranded sponsors also represented the diverse businesses found throughout the greater downtown Dallas area: corporate entities (AT&T, WeWork), local restaurants (Wild Salsa, Flying Horse Café), and small businesses (PCB, Katy Trail Vodka) provided critical items – from hot chocolate to Wi-Fi infrastructure – and financial assistance to make Unbranded an unwavering success.

## REPLICATION

Vacant and underutilized storefronts are a challenge in any downtown setting, often serving as inactive gaps in otherwise vibrant, pedestrian-focused corridors. Unbranded offers any place management organization (PMO) a viable, replicable solution to reactivate unused spaces, to mitigate the negative perceptions related to these often-blighted properties, and to bring vitality back to their neighborhood. DDI has been successful at replicating Unbranded in a variety of spaces throughout the pop-up's five-year history, acclimating to each location's nuances (no HVAC) or quirky designs; and, as PCB opens its micro-brewery soon, DDI will need to find a new location in which to replicate Unbranded in 2020 and beyond. Unbranded has been easily replicable in downtown Dallas as landlords are eager to fill numerous vacant storefronts with the pop-up in hopes that it could lead to a long-term lease similar to PCB. To replicate the most recent success of Unbranded, PMOs should identify sponsors looking to expand their presence or footprint in their downtown; having attractive, accessible spaces in which the pop-up is hosted is also critical to the project's overall success and proving brick-and-mortar retail a viable and sustainable activity in their downtown.

## COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

Unbranded has been a relatively simple project to successfully execute throughout its short history, and it continues to grow each year. Its success lies with those rallying around a common goal: DDI and its partners working together to reinvigorate and sustain active uses in neglected spaces throughout downtown, creating a vibrant urban experience for all. As a result, hosting Unbranded has proven to be an easy solution to reactivate downtown storefronts and streets; the challenge now is to locate a new space in which to host Unbranded. The success of PCB opening its new micro-brewery in a former Unbranded space could be attributed as a "right place, right time" scenario, a simple fix to fill a vacant storefront. However, the long-term vision to sustain retail activity in vacant storefronts has been more complex as much work went into securing PCB's long-term commitment to downtown Dallas. DDI staff worked with PCB over the course of a year to ensure all regulatory processes – from zoning to historic ordinances – were followed, and that City of Dallas staff and leadership understood the importance of PCB's opening and its long-term economic development implications for downtown.