

NORTH AUGUSTA USES ANALYTICS TO RECRUIT WATER PARK

Sometimes, major economic development breakthroughs come in ways you don't



expect. And that's exactly what happened in North Augusta, South Carolina, where the city's goal of recruiting retail and restaurant development received an unexpected boost from a 40 acre, \$21.5 million recreational development project: Scuttle's Island Water Park.

North Augusta's Story

North Augusta is a city of approximately 24,000 residents located just north of Augusta, Georgia.

LOCATION:

- North Augusta, South Carolina

POPULATION:

- 24,000

COMMUNITY NEEDS:

- Analytics to speak retail and restaurant developers' language

Being a smaller city in a larger metropolitan area presents retail recruitment challenges, and in the past the community was frustrated to see retailers and restaurants deciding to locate in surrounding areas.

The city's economic development efforts traditionally involved trying to build relationships with retail real estate decision makers, hoping to convince them to locate in North Augusta. But City Administrator Todd Glover said he quickly noticed a pattern: real estate directors would return calls from developers, but not from city leaders. He realized the reason for that is "the developer understands the metrics that those folks are looking for and the cities very rarely do."

To strengthen its recruitment pitch, North Augusta partnered with Buxton to receive the fact-based analysis retailers seek. Buxton studied the city's trade area and recommended retailers and restaurants who would be a good fit. Buxton also provided North Augusta with on-demand analysis and reporting through SCOUT, Buxton's web-based analytics platform.

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City Administrator of North Augusta

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An Unexpected Opportunity

While pursuing the retailers and restaurants recommended by Buxton, North Augusta received an unexpected opportunity. A group of investors was seeking a location to build a large regional water park. After encountering zoning issues in a neighboring county, the group was interested in meeting with North Augusta.

The city quickly identified three potential sites for the water park, researched how far people are usually willing to drive to such attractions, and ran custom reports in SCOUT for each site to show the number of households within that drive time. The city also used SCOUT to study how many households within the specified drive time of each site were likely to have visited a theme park within the last year, a more meaningful metric to the developers.

At the first meeting with the investors, North Augusta presented a united front with representatives from the city, county, and local economic development

organization. The city presented its recommended sites and the data to validate each one.

The investors were very impressed by the city’s proactive approach and the research presented. They quickly moved forward with steps to purchase property and just six months after the initial conversation, the development was publically announced.

Economic Impact

News of the development generated tremendous publicity for North Augusta. The developers were quick to compliment city leaders, which has helped to enhance North Augusta’s reputation as a business-friendly community.

As the largest attraction of its kind in the region, Scuttle’s Island Water Park is expected to draw 250,000-300,000 visitors each season. Glover notes that if just 10 percent of those visitors choose to stay overnight in North Augusta, the number of hotel guests will be greater than the city’s population.

Not surprisingly, other developers are taking notice. Interest is high in building hotels and restaurants around the new water park, and the city is working to capitalize on the development momentum.

By presenting a united front, proactively working to meet the needs of developers, and providing data-backed recommendations on locations using SCOUT, North Augusta has recruited a development that will benefit the community for many years to come.