

WHY EVENT FOOT TRAFFIC DOESN'T AUTOMATICALLY BECOME STORE TRAFFIC

One of the most common assumptions about events in a downtown district is that large crowds automatically translate into increased sales for every business. While events absolutely increase visibility, awareness, and overall district activity, foot traffic on the street does not always equal foot traffic inside businesses on event days.

Understanding visitor behavior during events can help businesses better position themselves for success.

Event Attendees Are Often in “Browsing Mode”

Many people attending an event are focused on:

- Walking the district
- Visiting vendors or attractions
- Listening to music or entertainment
- Socializing with friends and family
- Eating and drinking outdoors
- Experiencing the atmosphere

This means visitors may not naturally transition into traditional shopping behavior unless they are intentionally invited to do so.

People Need a Reason to Walk Inside

Even in a busy district, many attendees:

- Assume stores are too crowded
- Don't realize businesses are open
- Feel unsure whether they are welcome to browse
- Believe stores may be expensive or formal
- Are trying to keep moving with their group

Businesses that actively create an inviting experience tend to see stronger results during events than businesses that simply rely on increased street traffic alone.

Visibility Is Still Valuable

Even when visitors do not immediately make purchases, events provide important long-term value by:

- Introducing new people to the district
- Increasing awareness of businesses
- Creating repeat future customers
- Encouraging social media exposure
- Building familiarity and trust with visitors

For many attendees, the first event visit is discovery. Future visits often become intentional shopping or dining trips.

Businesses That Perform Best During Events

Typically:

- Keep storefronts visually open and welcoming
- Offer event-exclusive specials or products
- Create quick grab-and-go options
- Use signage that clearly communicates they are open
- Offer interactive experiences, samples, or demonstrations
- Extend hours or create after-event experiences
- Train staff to actively welcome visitors

Small changes in energy and presentation can significantly impact whether attendees decide to enter a business.

Events Are Designed to Support the Entire District

Events help activate public spaces, increase district awareness, and create a vibrant atmosphere that benefits the downtown as a whole. While not every event attendee will enter every business, strong events increase overall exposure and create opportunities for long-term customer growth.

Businesses that adapt their event-day strategies to match visitor behavior often see the strongest results over time.

Events Create Opportunities — Businesses Create Customers

Events are best viewed as large-scale lead generation opportunities for the district. Their role is to bring people into the downtown, create energy, and introduce visitors to businesses they may not have otherwise discovered. Once attendees are in the district, it becomes the responsibility of individual businesses to convert that attention into customers through welcoming storefronts, strong customer experiences, clear messaging, compelling products, and intentional engagement. Businesses that approach events proactively rather than passively often see the strongest long-term results, even if purchases do not happen immediately during the event itself.

Tips to Increase In-Store Traffic During Events

1. “Market Day Exclusive” Item

Give people a reason to step inside immediately.

Examples:

- \$5 mini bouquet
- Farmers Market cocktail/mocktail
- “Only available Thursdays”
- Free cookie with purchase
- Small impulse item near checkout

The key is exclusivity + visibility from the sidewalk.

2. Offer a “Rest Stop” Experience

Many event attendees are hot, tired, carrying bags, or overwhelmed. Businesses that provide relief become destinations.

Ideas:

- Free ice water station
- Air conditioning signage (“Cool Off Inside”)
- Small seating area
- Phone charging station
- Clean restroom access for customers
- Kids coloring table

People who stop to rest are much more likely to browse and buy.

3. Bounce-Back Coupon

Hand out simple same-day offers:

- “Come back before 8pm for 10% off”
- “Show your market purchase for a free appetizer”
- “Spend \$25 get a free gift”

Restaurants especially benefit because many visitors leave after walking the market.

4. Create an “Instagram Corner”

People love experiences during events.

Ideas:

- Historic photo wall
- Floral backdrop
- Neon sign
- Vintage display
- Seasonal decor

Add signage:

- “Tag us for a chance to win a \$25 gift card.”

This gets people physically inside and spreads awareness online.

5. Offer Quick Grab-and-Go Items

Market visitors are moving constantly.

Retailers:

- \$10 shelves near door
- “Market favorites”
- Pre-bagged gifts

Restaurants:

- Window pickup drinks
- Walking cocktails (where legal)
- Hand pies, slices, skewers, ice cream

People avoid entering if they think it’ll take too long.

6. Live Demonstrations or Micro-Experiences

Activity pulls people inside better than products.

Examples:

- Clothing styling demo
- Candle pouring
- Mini tastings

- Artist painting live
- Chef grilling samples
- “Build your own bouquet”
- Kids activity table

Even a 5-minute experience increases dwell time.

7. Cross-Promote with Vendors

Partner directly with market vendors.

Examples:

- “Buy from Booth 214 and get 10% off inside.”
- Vendor includes business coupon in bags.
- Restaurant features ingredients from a vendor.
- Retailer hosts “featured maker of the week.”

This turns vendors into ambassadors instead of competitors.

8. Use Doorway Energy

Many storefronts unintentionally feel closed during busy events.

Encourage businesses to:

- Keep doors open
- Play music outward
- Use strong lighting
- Put products near entrances
- Place staff near entrance
- Remove visual barriers

Historic downtowns, in particular, can feel intimidating or “expensive” unless businesses intentionally soften the threshold.

9. Create a Store Passport or Scavenger Hunt

Businesses can work together informally without needing district coordination.

Examples:

- Visit 5 participating shops for a prize drawing
- Hidden item hunt inside stores
- “Collect a sticker from every stop”
- Restaurant tasting trail
- Kids scavenger hunt

This gives attendees a reason to intentionally walk inside multiple businesses instead of only browsing the street.

10. Extend the Experience After the Market

A lot of people leave at 8pm because the energy suddenly ends.

Ideas:

- “After Market Happy Hour”
- Live acoustic music inside
- Dessert specials
- Late shopping hours
- Sip & shop
- Glow-night atmosphere
- Outdoor seating activation

The goal is shifting from, “event ends at 8:00,” to, “the evening continues downtown.”