

# Texas company to identify retailers for Safford

By Aimee Staten, Managing Editor  
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What retail companies and restaurants are the best fit for the Gila Valley and, specifically, for Safford? Can the Gila Valley support an Applebees, a Kohls or even a Bed, Bath & Beyond?

While the wish lists of many residents may be long, without the tools to conduct extensive research into the requirements of retail and restaurant corporations, nobody local really knows.

There is a company from Fort Worth, Texas, that can not only figure out the spending habits of every Valley family, it can play matchmaker between Safford and the companies that can exist in the local economy. That company is Buxton, and the tool it uses is its *CommunityID* program.

With a unanimous vote Monday night, the Safford City Council took the first step to acquire the knowledge Buxton can provide. Not, however, before council members engaged in an extended discussion on whether or not it should become competitive in its search for new businesses.

## Matchmaker, matchmaker

The Buxton *CommunityID* program, which has 300 community clients, starts by working with the city to identify three potential retail sites, their trade areas and the drive times of customers.

Buxton then does a psychographic analysis of local households from data collected from numerous databases.

Robert Belcher, the territory business manager for *CommunityID* who made the

presentation to the council, said psychographic data is like "demographics on steroids."

Demographic studies look at the sex, age, race and income of a particular group. Psychographics looks at the customers' actual lifestyles, media habits and purchasing behaviors. By tapping into one of its 200 databases, Buxton has an overview of the spending, eating and recreational habits of local families.

The way it does this is from the data trails left by consumers every time they make purchases with debit or credit cards or apply for credit or warranties.

"People leave crumbs everywhere," Belcher said. "We buy that data."

From the information gathered, Buxton can tell Safford what companies to court to prevent what it calls "retail leakage," which occurs every time consumers leave the Valley to shop elsewhere. It also identifies demands for retail goods and services and spending trends.

Other information gathered for the community plan comes from growth plans from the city, surrounding housing and commercial developments and retail goals of the community.

Once the three retail sites are identified, the city of Safford can choose up to 20 retailers for development of marketing packages. The packages are designed by Buxton for presentation to retailers, developers and franchises. Each package will tell the potential

investor why Safford is a good place to locate.

Buxton will also contact the retailers on behalf of Safford to let them know the city has been chosen as a viable location for business. The map with site and trade areas, site determination, list of retailers and the marketing packages will be done by Buxton in 35 business not including the time the city takes for consideration of the retailers.

"With *CommunityID*, you will have immediate competitive advantage," Belcher said. "In 60 days you will be able to aggressively market yourselves to the retailers on the list."

At the end of that time, the city will be poised to contact retailers at the International Council of Shopping Centers convention in Las Vegas on May 20-23.

## Reservations

Safford Mayor Ron Green said he had several reservations about jumping into an agreement with Buxton.

One reason for this was the initial cost, which pays for the map, retail list and marketing packages. Travel and additional requests by the city cost extra.

Green asked about sharing the costs with other communities and what guarantees the city could expect from Buxton regarding the listed retailers.

Belcher told him Buxton simply identifies the retailers for the city. After the marketing packages are distributed, it would be up to the

city to offer incentives to attract the retailer.

"This is a competitive market," he said.

Amy E. Wetzel, vice president of the Western Division for the Community/ID division, said the city was taking a proactive approach to commercial growth by enlisting the help of Buxton.

"It's called getting in the game," she said. "Are you going to differentiate yourselves by doing this?"

Vice Mayor J.T. Cotter said he prefers the city to "go after" the retailers it wants in the community. "We better be proactive," he said.

While he wants to work with neighboring communities, Cotter said he was interested in what the council can do for the citizens of Safford. "I represent Safford, not these other communities," he said.

Planning and Community Director Pete Stasiak said the city is going to have to write its own destiny. He said Buxton would save the city the money and expense of going after retailers that would not work for the Gila Valley.

"They (Buxton) are going to arm us with customer profiles to eliminate four out of five of those retailers," Stasiak said.

Cotter said the city would quickly recoup any money spent on the study when businesses began to locate in Safford.

Councilor Ed Ragland said if Safford doesn't move quickly on this, one of its neighbors might, and that would give the neighbor the competitive edge.

The vice mayor reminded the council of the work done by the previous administration to attract the Wal-Mart Supercenter.

"We worked for about four years to bring the Wal-Mart here," he said. "If we hadn't, we wouldn't be getting these new roads."

All members of the council raised their hands when the vote was called to accept the contract with Buxton.