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AUSTIN LETTER

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Dear Client:

Should Austin be nicknamed Event City? Take a look around. Hardly a week goes by without several events attracting out-of-towners and residents alike. And while these events are entertaining for many, there are tradeoffs for the city. Can you spell t-r-a-f-f-i-c?

Make a guess. How many events do you think are staged annually in Austin? A Movability Austin representative estimates **there are more than 150 events staged in Austin each year.** Think about that. This is an **average of about three per week** and most of them take place over a weekend – with a large majority concentrated in the downtown area. And more are being planned as we speak.

This is a recent phenomenon in Austin's history. In fact just a few decades ago the Austin Chamber of Commerce, responding to complaints from its business members that **Austin needed to do more to attract visitors, created the Austin Aqua Festival.** It was hugely successful, bringing dollars to the summer economy, before running its course.

But as the AquaFest faded, **the event spigot started gushing.** Sure, some events come and go. But Austin appears to be in a period where **new, big events are being created (Formula One Racing) and successful events are expanding (Austin City Limits music festival).**

This flood of events is almost like a tsunami. The events bring huge numbers to Austin who spend a lot of money that circulates through the community, then they leave. But. **The events themselves make this an attractive community to many.** Some visitors like what they see and **later move to the metro area** where jobs are being created at one of the fastest paces in the nation. This makes it possible for those who see Austin as a “cool, vibrant” place to find a job and make a living.

Even though the population growth is spread throughout much of the metro, local residents head downtown to join the flood of tourists attending these events. **This triggers traffic problems.** Are you one of those who don't participate in these large and small (such as the 5K and 10K runs) events? **If so, do you avoid the downtown area where most of them are held due to the difficulty getting around?** Event traffic is a problem and it is exacerbated due to major construction projects and the increase in downtown residences. More on traffic, next.

For varying reasons, Austin has had traffic problems for years. But as the city changes, so have the *types* of traffic problems – especially for vehicles in downtown. And that means *parking* is the cause of more cursing than you find in a military barracks.

Oh sure, there has been a heavy emphasis on public transportation, bicycle mobility and enhancements for pedestrians. And the use of transit, carpooling and bicycling is on the rise. **However, vehicular traffic continues to grow.**

But, as the new apartments and condos fill up, the **residents bring their cars with them** – even though they may walk to work, etc. Many visitors to the ever-increasing, ever-expanding Austin-centric events use their own cars, or rent cars, to get around. Also, as jobs continue to increase in downtown buildings, **many employees who live outside downtown generally still use vehicles to go to-and-from work.** And events contribute to this sticky situation.

To help ease the parking hassles (and cut down on the “cussing”), Austin is one of the few cities in the nation to use high tech help. **If a driver has a smartphone, he or she has a fighting chance at finding a parking spot – courtesy of an app created by an outfit called ParkMe.** The app is free, even though the parking may not be.

Data is sent from the city’s smart parking meters to the app (now you know one of the reasons the old clunker meters were replaced). **The app is refreshed every five minutes and includes both on-street and off-street spaces.** Data is displayed on your smartphone using “heat maps.”

These are colored overlays on streets that show real-time and predicted parking space availability. Rather than sending you on a wild goose chase for a single free spot, **the heat map gives you a general idea of the difficulty of parking in a given area at a given time.**

According to *Wired* magazine, “ParkMe also features a recommendation engine. Just give it an address and – like a long-time local – **it’ll tell you the cheapest place to stash your ride.**”

In addition to the smartphone interface, **ParkMe also lets businesses display parking heat maps for free on their own websites.** This is good news for shops and restaurants hoping to attract people who would otherwise say “the hell with it” (there’s that cussing thing again), “let’s head away from downtown where there’s a guarantee of a space in a lot.” For more info, go to www.ParkMe.com.

Back to where we started – the plethora of events in Austin. The newer events are added on top of other big deals such as six home Texas Longhorns football games where attendance exceeds 100,000 per game, and the Texas Book Festival that brings the literati to the State Capitol grounds. **Maybe Austin should be called the “Live Music and Event Capital of the World.”**

“We’ve created a perpetuating cycle in Austin. Companies are moving here for access to young talent. Young people are moving here for access to jobs.” This quote from a man who has devoted his career to studying demographics about sums it up.

And the rate people are moving to Austin from across the country is going to accelerate, according to the City of Austin demographer, **Ryan Robinson**. He cites recent job creation announcements from respected companies to underscore the trend he is predicting.

“It’s really simple,” Robinson was quoted recently. **“People know they have a better chance of finding a real job in Austin than they do in their hometowns. From the birth of America, this notion has driven people to cross oceans to find a job. Now they just have to pack into a Toyota Corolla and spend a day driving to Austin.**

The announcements? Let’s tick off a few of ’em just in the last few months. **General Motors** is planning a 500-job innovation center in Austin. **Apple** announced it is adding 3,000+ more jobs to double its workforce here. A **Seattle-based software company** plans to open an Austin office that will eventually hire 150 workers. California-based **HID Global** announced plans to add more than 200 full-time jobs over ten years.

Oh, yeah. Don’t forget expansions at **Samsung** and **Facebook**. And what about **Circuit of the Americas**, the venue that will open in November to host international Formula One races for years, as well as host *other* events year-round? Governor **Rick Perry**, after meeting with race officials in Italy this week at the Italian Grand Prix predicted the facility east of Austin will **attract 1.2 million visitors annually to the Austin area**. Jobs will be created at the track to host those year-round events.

You can see what Robinson means when he says what we have in Austin is a “perpetuating cycle.” Of course, this amazing momentum is likely to slow. These cycles always do. But, for now, **the Austin area is the envy of city economic development pros all over the US.**

This is bolstered by all those national reports that seem to always include Austin in the “Top This” or “Top That” categories. For instance, according to the latest Manpower Employment Outlook Survey published this week, **Austin has the 5th best employment outlook in the US**. Manpower surveyed more than 18,000 employers across the country for this latest employment outlook.

Looking at the stats another way, an analysis by *On Numbers*, a division of BizJournals.com, reported this week **the Austin area had the second highest number of private sector jobs and sustained the highest percentage of job growth since July 2007**. This isn’t Austin patting itself on the back, these are non-biased numbers crunchers. The momentum continues.

With the excitement and fanfare surrounding this week's announcement of the iPhone 5, it raises the question of how Apple's iconic lowercase "i" came to be? Because of Apple's dominance in our daily lives, the little "i" started a fad that defies capitalization rules.

Let's see. iPhone, iMac, iPad, iPod, iTunes and so on. Apple's then-CEO **Steve Jobs** initially rejected the suggested name when it was proposed for the iMac. Wouldn't you know it, the guy who came up with the lowercase "i" idea was an advertising man. **Ken Segall** finally convinced Jobs that **the little letter could evoke a sense of individuality or innovation.**

But what does the "i" really stand for? He confesses he hates to make it sound less magical than it may seem, but **it's really only about the Internet.** He points out that when all this came about, **not everyone had an email address and connecting to the Internet was a challenge for the everyday consumer.** So, he says, the intent of the iMac was to take away some of this mystery and make the Internet more accessible.

By the way, Segall has written a book about Apple's approach. The title of *The New York Times* best-seller: *Insanely Simple: The Obsession That Drives Apple's Success.* In the book, he points out that Apple's most powerful weapon is that it is **made up of smaller groups of smart people – and zero committees.**

He also said Jobs could care less what his customers wanted. He felt it was Apple's job to **come up with innovative products that its customers didn't even know they would want.**

In that vein, the new iPhone 5 sports a **thinner, lighter body with a larger screen, faster chip** and the ability to **connect to high-speed LTE networks.** The device will launch initially 9.21.12 at a starting price of \$199.

Dr. Louis Overholster said the new 85 miles per hour speed limit on the SH130 toll road around Austin is a safety issue: "Going that fast, a pickup driver could lose control of his beer!"

Sincerely



Editor/Publisher