

Downtown Lawrence

Growing a Local Economy with Custom-Loop Gift Cards

CLIENT NAME

Downtown Lawrence

PROFILE

Downtown District

PARTICIPATING MERCHANTS

125+

CARDS FUNDED

4,924

TOTAL FUNDS LOADED

\$222,103 and counting

College towns are ideal places for small, locally owned business to thrive. Between students, alumni, entrenched residents and curious travelers, there's no shortage of consumers who want to preserve their community's character.

Still, it can be tough for even the most vibrant college towns to uphold their local economies. Big-box stores and large metropolitan areas are often a stone's throw away, and many residents leave town during the retail-heavy holidays.

To address their many challenges, EML client Downtown Lawrence Incorporated (DLI) in Lawrence, Kan., replaced its old gift certificate program with custom-loop gift cards.

Located minutes away from the University of Kansas, DLI's mission is to preserve, protect and promote Downtown Lawrence as the retail, service and professional, governmental, entertainment and social center of the city. With cards redeemable only at participating merchants, they've done just that.

Replacing Paper Gift Certificates

DLI's impetus for change was an outdated, paper-based gift certificate program that did little to keep funds within the community.

"The old certificates were basically cashier's checks, and they

were so low-tech that it was actually high-tech to track it all," says Sally Zogry, DLI Executive Director. "They were treated as cash, too, so if you had a \$50 gift certificate and a \$5 total, the merchant had to give you \$45 in change."

That refunded cash could be — and often was — spent at non-participating businesses. To protect DLI and entice more merchants, Zogry partnered with EML to create a custom-loop gift card program.

"EML was the only company that offered closed loop that did not require additional equipment or a charge to participating merchants," she said. "Now we can offer a great gift that lets people go to restaurants, movies, live music, bookstores, clothing stores and more, all while keeping the money in our community."

Improving Customer Service

Compared to paper certificates, EML gift cards have allowed DLI to offer better, more efficient customer service. In addition to selling at their main office, open Monday through Friday, they now sell cards online and through two of their participating merchants: a live music venue open six days per week and an art gallery open every day. Cards are also packaged with a list of accepting business, and the clerks selling them are more knowledgeable on their redemption and troubleshooting.

“Between myself and an assistant, DLI essentially has one and a half employees, and the ability to sell through these venues has made a major difference in our sales,” says Zogry. At each of these venues, EML’s CardSpot® card activation software allows for fast, convenient distribution.

In addition to multiple points of sale, Zogry has leveraged EML’s around-the-clock support staff.

“The thing that’s great from an organizational standpoint is the 24/7/365 service for customers and merchants who have questions,” she says. “I used to get inundated with voicemails every weekend. Now, any cardholder or merchant can call the number or visit the website on the back of their card.”

Providing for Consistent Growth

Merchants are just as pleased with the cards as their customers. Many members have enjoyed the cards’ tracking capabilities, in particular, which allow them to see exactly when and where funds are spent. Tracking card declines has also allowed DLI to find which merchants haven’t yet signed up – and get them enrolled as quickly as possible.

A lack of POS upgrades also contributes to the cards’ universal appeal.

“People in DLI have everything from the most up-to-date POS system to just a cash box and credit card terminal, and finding something that works for everyone has been critical to our success,” says Zogry. As long as a business can accept Mastercard®, they can accept a Downtown Lawrence gift card.

The results so far? Over 125 merchants have hopped on board, and Downtown Lawrence shoppers have purchased nearly 5,000 cards and loaded almost a quarter million dollars since the program’s adoption in November 2015. What’s more, DLI has seen a 21 percent increase in holiday season gift card sales from 2015 to 2016.

Overall, custom loop gift cards are helping DLI foster long-term growth in Downtown Lawrence.

“Our mission as a downtown business association is to drive business to our members and keep as many dollars in our area as possible,” says Zogry. “As the only company that offered closed loop cards with no monthly merchant fees, EML has made that possible.”

“EML was the only company that offered closed loop that did not require additional equipment or a charge to participating merchants,”

Sally Zogry
Executive Director
Downtown Lawrence



EML Custom-Loop Gift Cards

Increase sales and merchant satisfaction with a private redemption network and mobile card activation – all without any hardware or software changes.

- Sell cards in-store and online
- Direct spend to select merchants
- Easy activation process
- Quick program implementation
- No POS hardware or software changes