

LeBron James' decision ignites push to market Miami globally

When LeBron James said he'll "take my talents to South Beach," he ignited a resurgent push behind more than just the popular beachfront destination.

The Miami Heat acquisition's statement on national television last week set greater Miami marketers abuzz. As William Talbert, president of the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, told *USA Today*, "I could not have written that phrase better as a destination marker."

James' decision could be worth millions to the market, he said.

With that phrase in their pocket – and in search engine results globally – marketers across South Florida are ramping up their efforts to mark individual regions as unique from "South Beach." Beyond the party town, playground persona, the marketers hope to capitalize on the national – and international – attention.

"LeBron's arrival has effectively changed the conversation in the press from real es-



BOOSTING YOUR BUSINESS

Jeff Zbar

tate bust and foreclosures to Miami glitz and glam," said Tadd Schwartz, principal with Schwartz Media Strategies. The Coconut Grove firm handles PR for the Miami Downtown Development Authority, the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, the Miami Art Museum and office tower 1450 Brickell.

James' arrival comes as the national media – including *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *The New York Times* and NBC's "Today" – have profiled downtown's transformation, resurgent condo activity and robust nightlife amid the urban core, Schwartz said. "LeBron affirmed that when he chose Miami."

Downtown marketers are preparing for the foot traffic and visitors Heat games will bring, said Robert Geitner, senior manager for marketing and communications with the DDA. In the days following James' announcement, DDA marketing partners met to discuss strategy. The DDA already has been pitching its "I Do It DWNTWN" cooperative marketing effort with area retailers, restaurants and bars. This fall, that campaign will ramp up, Geitner said. While media plans still are in the works, he anticipates the effort will include merchandising,

entertainment and other events. Bars are expected to host watch parties for local residents and partygoers who can't get game tickets, he said.

The DDA also is in partnership with the CVB, American Airlines and the Beacon Council on its "Miami: Where Worlds Meet" international marketing campaign. How that program may be adapted is still being discussed, he said. Public and media relations campaigns are also being reviewed. But, his task is clear: to help media and consumers understand that downtown and the Heat's home – the American Airlines Arena – are a vital part of Miami.

"In next two to three weeks, nuances and messages will start to emerge. We will have to find what's resonating with the media," Geitner said. "People are discovering there's more to Miami than great beaches and hot spots on Ocean Drive."

The CVB is already running a multimillion-dollar campaign promoting greater Miami as a destination to live, work and play, said Rolando Aedo, the CVB's senior VP of marketing. James, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh represent such prospects. Today, the CVB was expected to debut national print and



Turkel

online ads promoting the region.

In the end, how the world perceives greater Miami's particular geography might be irrelevant, said Bruce Turkel, CEO and executive creative director with Turkel in Coconut Grove, which handles advertising for the CVB.

Visitors may hit restaurants in Coral Gables, clubs in South Beach, the racetrack in Homestead, tennis on Key Biscayne, the culture of Wynwood, or the bars and nightlife found downtown.

They don't know they're in a different part of Miami – or even a different municipality, the Miami Beach native said. In that way, greater Miami is a ship raised by the tide of James' statement.

"The big winner is our tourism," he said. "It's just another reason people want to be here – even for people who don't like basketball."

JEFF ZBAR covers marketing, technology and small business strategies. Contact him at jeffzbar@gmail.com or (954) 346-4393.