



Why are Grasmere businesses not thriving the way they should be?

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Abstract

The purpose of my research was to study the businesses around my neighborhood and to have a better understanding as to why these businesses were going out of business at a rapid pace. In order to find answers to my research question I used two methods of research which were quantitative and qualitative methods. Through my research I was able to connect with my neighborhood more than expected. The end result of my research was that the owners of these businesses relied on the fact that Grasmere was a wealthy town therefore they assumed their business would always thrive. I also found out that the majority of these owners did not have the experience needed before launching their businesses and they lack on using marketing strategies. Being a fashion marketing student I had a hard time figuring out how these businesses have been running all these years.

(Key Words: Answers, methods, businesses, marketing strategies, lack, experience.)

Introduction

To start off my research, I began with a walkthrough of my neighborhood where I spent 30-40 minutes observing its surroundings in search to find something that would relate to my career field of interest which is fashion marketing, especially marketing. I moved to Staten Island, New York in the fall of 2015 during my senior year of high school. I am originally from Bensonhurst, Brooklyn and was forced to move out due to gentrification. At that time Chinese people were buying all the buildings in the neighborhood causing rent to go up and people to move out. My family and I being part of that drastic change. My new neighborhood is called Grasmere, Staten Island which is located on the east shore of the island. Grasmere is a quiet suburban area surrounded by lakes and ponds. Grasmere's nearest neighbors are Park Hill and Old Town. The name Grasmere derives from American resident Sir Roderick Cameron, he is of Canadian descent and was knighted by Queen Victoria, former queen of The United Kingdom and Ireland. The neighborhood is also known to be one of Staten Island's prestigious communities.

The community is filled with Italian, Hispanic, Chinese, African American and Indian people. I live near a shopping center that consists of a pizza shop, Intoxx Fitness, C-Town, deli, barber shop, dry cleaners, nail salon, Italian restaurant and physical therapy clinic that is never busy. I think the only facilities that have the most heavy customer traffic are C-Town, Intoxx fitness and barber shop. Since 2015, I have seen nearly six different businesses relocate or go out of business. During my neighborhood walkthrough I realized the neighborhood had undergone a serious overhaul of constructions. This includes the new railroad station, brand new housing establishments, new businesses, renovations of old houses, new pavement of roads and

sidewalks. With so much change, my research was based off of the new and old businesses in my neighborhood.

Neighborhood Research

As mentioned previously I am studying fashion marketing at The New York City College of Technology, because of my knowledge and experience in the field I was intrigued by the fact that this prestigious neighborhood had so many businesses going out of business. Why is so much “out of business” happening? What are businesses doing wrong? What are they lacking? What is their marketing mix? Having experience in repositioning a brand/business I decided to start my research by figuring out which businesses I would be observing the most. Repositioning is when a company is forced to change its brand status in the marketplace by implementing changes to its marketing mix which consist of product, place, price and promotion. When repositioning needs to happen we have to keep in consideration customers demands. My solution to keep businesses operating was to find out the reason that motivated these businesses to open in this neighborhood? What was their vision and mission statement?

The businesses I decided to focus on were Ambrosio Italian Restaurant & Banquet Hall, Pizza Shop, Mexian/Peruvian restaurant, and corner deli. All of these businesses aren't far from each but each receive a different traffic of customers everyday.

The first business I visited was Ambrosio Italian Restaurant & Banquet Hall. The restaurant is located inside the small shopping center a block away from my house. Where this restaurant is located I have seen two different restaurants go out of business in less than two years. I can't recall the names of the previous restaurants because I never took the liberty to go and have dinner. Ambrosio Italian restaurant and banquet hall has beautiful aesthetics for their

interior design. The restaurant from the inside represents elegance and romance. I decided to take my mother out to dinner on September 14, 2019 at 8:00 PM. Our waiter, Vincent, assisted us right away and asked for our orders. I told him I was new to the restaurant and to recommend their most popular dishes. It seemed like he was a new employee and was still in training because he was not familiar with the menu. My mom and I spent an hour at the restaurant and only ordered appetizers. Why? Well after our waiter took our orders for appetizers he decided to go outside and smoke with the rest of his coworkers while my mother and I were left inside without anyone available to assist us if we needed anything. They all spent 20 minutes outside talking. We ordered calamari fritti, fior di latte and baked clams. In total we spent \$60 for dinner. There is this saying “Moms cooking cannot be replaced.” I wished I had stayed home and have my mom cook dinner instead. Everyone started good by giving us a great welcome to their facility but fell off in the middle of the service.

My next destination was the peruvian restaurant, I decided to go on September 20 but this time with my best friend. My best friend is a very picky eater which I felt like would be a big help since she would be honest about the food and critique it. From the moment we walked in our bad experience began, there was no hostess and we felt like we were at a club rather than a restaurant. Whoever was in charge of the music disregarded the fact that others may not want to listen to it. The restaurants interior design was boring, it looked dirty and definitely like it was struggling to make money. They had christmas ornament hanging on the ceiling, I mean I know we are three months away from Christmas but it's a little too early to put up those kinds of decorations. Although it looked to me as if those christmas decorations had been up for quite some time and needed cleaning. I have tried Peruvian food before and it was delicious, well

cooked and the flavors had you licking all five fingers. Incas Grill gave us the opposite of that. We ordered our food and in less than 15 min we had our food on the table which was still cold, did not taste fresh and the flavors were not completely hitting our taste buds. We ordered their ceviche because we noticed the other four customers that were in there had ordered it. When we took our first bite we knew something was wrong. I am not sure how old the fish inside the ceviche was but I can tell you this, we both got sick. We did not finish our food. Food that tastes this bad and gets people sick should not be priced so high. Our bill came out to be \$40 for two ceviches + \$13 for two sodas = \$53.00. Food hygiene and safety is one of many things this restaurant is lacking.

After my experience at both restaurants I did not want to continue with my research because I felt like every other business would be the same but I had to get through it all in order to have my questions answered. Monday September 21, 2019 I was able to leave my internship an hour early, 5:00 PM, and decided to stop by the Italian restaurant first to have a drink. By the time I got to Staten Island it was 7:30 PM which is usually a good time to have dinner as well but I didn't. I was determined to stay there for another hour and see what their service would be like on a Monday night. From 7:30 PM to 8:30 PM I saw one person come in and it was to order take out.

The next two locations I had yet to visit were the pizza shop and corner deli.

On September 29 around 1:00 PM, the pizza shop had a long line outside which stood out to me because since its grand opening i've never seen that happen. The long line turned out to be that customers just wanted to eat pizza that day. The service provided at this facility was better than the other two restaurants I'd gone to. Despite the business being busy that day we got our

pizza quick and it tasted delicious. After this experience I decided to instead of just trying out the food and experiencing the facilities customer service, I would speak to managers, employees and owners directly about my research and see what information I could gather in order to come up with a clear solution/answer.

Methodology:

As I no longer continued with my initial tactics to find out the answers to my research, instead a series of interviews were conducted. Before conducting any interviews, every participant received an informed consent form. The informed consent form notified them that the research being conducted was for a school research and it asked if they consented to have the information they would disclose to me to be shared with others. Luckily all participants, a total of fifteen gave me their consent to share the given information. To start off my interviews I began by letting them know a small portion of my personal details which allowed to feel comfortable and find it easier to have a full 25 to 30 minute interview. I asked them to be honest in order for me to give them feedback on what I feel is working and not working in their business.

Quantitative Research

The first aspect of the quantitative portion of this research involved with the interview and analyzing each answer in order to find the root of the problem. The other quantitative portion of this research involved around the kind of service the businesses give their customers. The first group of people being interviewed were the restaurants owners/managers. These restaurants were Incas Peruvian/Mexican Restaurant, Ambrosio Italian Restaurant & Banquet Hall and lastly the

pizza shop. The second group of interviews were done on owners/managers of C-Town and corner deli..

The questions I asked were:

1. How long have you been living in Staten Island for?
2. What was your field of interest? Was it business?
3. What inspired you to open a business in this neighborhood?
4. Did you do any research on this neighborhood before opening your business?
5. What kind of marketing/business strategies did you implement for your business?
6. Since you've been open what kind of impact has your business had?
7. Where do you see your business in five years?

The answers to these questions were very hard for me to listen to because I was expecting different responses from each individual.

Qualitative Research

Due to the responses being almost the same as each other I decided to group the ones that has the same response to the ones that did not. The results collected from each interview were the following:

Owner of Pizza shop, Incas and Italian restaurant, C-Town, and corner deli

1. I have been living in Staten Island for almost 40 years, which means I have witnessed more change that you have throughout the five years you've been living here.
2. I never thought of anything else other than owning a business especially because we grew up with parents telling us that a business can make us a lot of money.

3. Growing up being poor gave me the motivation to strive for better things in life especially because I wanted a family and needed to have the means to take care of them. By opening up my business I could provide everything I did not have to them. The neighborhood was surrounded by wealthy people therefore I envisioned that my business would thrive.
4. Doing research was never part of my plan, I mainly just wanted to open up the business and wait for it to start making me money. The only research I knew was the wealth of the town.
5. I had no marketing/business strategies.
6. Since I've been opened for business I haven't seen any good impacts, just that we are losing money.
7. I will most likely relocate to a high volume neighborhood, perhaps things will change there and if they don't I will be forced to close the doors of my business and find other ways to provide for my family.

The kinds of answers received from these residents definitely made me feel like I needed to quit school and start working with them to have a successful business. All of these owners are Italian and Indian males, ages 40 and up.

Qualitative Research of Second group

1. I've been living in this borough for about 30 + years.
2. I wanted to study business because my dream was to open up my own business.
3. I wanted to make money and provide for my family.
4. I did not do any research on this neighborhood. I felt like it was a safe neighborhood where I could establish my legacy.
5. I don't implement any marketing/business strategies in order to promote our business.
6. People who live in the area have become like family to us and they sometimes promote our business to their friends through word of mouth but because Grasmere is such a small neighborhood many people are not familiar with it.
7. At the moment I am living paycheck to paycheck therefore saving money for the future has become harder to do. I see my business going out of business.

To run a business is not an easy thing to do, especially when you've never done it before and with the lack of knowledge on the in-depth materials that are needed to succeed an individual will not be able to thrive. I found it interesting that these owners were extremely intrigued by the fact that their neighborhood was filled with wealthy people and yet their businesses are still not doing as good as they should be.

I began to work on my repositioning plan and used the methods I have learned for brand/business repositioning. I began to jot down the pros and cons of everything I have gathered up. Through the marketing mix you are able to do your research before your grand opening, this becomes easier to do because you are familiar with your target market or at least should be

familiar with who you want your consumers to be. The marketing mix is also known as the four P's, product, price, promotion and place.

Conclusion

Now, I understand the restaurants mission statements are to introduce traditional Italian and Peruvian/Mexican cuisine to their community. Like any other business, I figured both businesses envisioned success and to be a five star rating online to attract more customers. But how can a business succeed if their product which is food is not meeting customer's standards?

Modern day society is all about visuals. How can we incorporate that into a food business? Through their menus and dish presentations. Incas Grill is the one that worries me the most because their idea of a pretty plate was disappointing. One of the greatest chefs in the world, Gordon Ramsey stated that when a dish leaves the kitchen it has to be clean without any smudges, your food needs to be sectioned in the proper form so your customer can see all the elements that were incorporated into that specific dish. Our ceviche was all over the place and if it wasn't for me having tried it at another restaurant I don't think we would have been able to figure out what ingredients it had. The techniques Incas Grill would consider for plate presentation would be choosing the perfect plate, the placement of ingredients, colors and designs being incorporated.

The menu plays a big role in the business because it serves an introduction to what the restaurant is willing to serve. At Ambrosio the presentation was good. Their con would be customer service, the waiter leaving for almost 30 minutes to smoke was not something a customer wants to see. These kinds of restaurants belong in a more fast paced environment/area.

Grasmere, Staten Island is a great neighborhood but not for businesses because most of the people living in it prefer to dine in at home and when going out they head to the city or another borough. As for C-Town and corner deli my suggestion is to send out weekly catalogs of what their new promotions are, this falls under the category of price and promotion of the marketing mix.

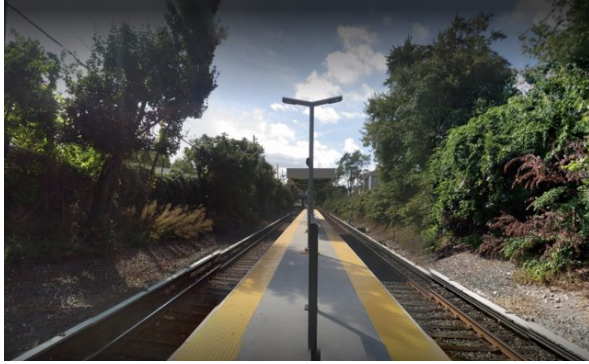
Another strategy that I would recommend for businesses to always provide is an experience it doesn't necessarily entail an employee interacting with the customer but also going the extra mile. At C-Town supermarket they can provide a delivery service for those who do not have a car to carry multiple bags home, especially the elderly. In fashion we call this sensory retailing but it can absolutely work for any industry, the only thing that changes is the field/industry.

CITATIONS

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STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK





GRASMERE, STATEN ISLAND

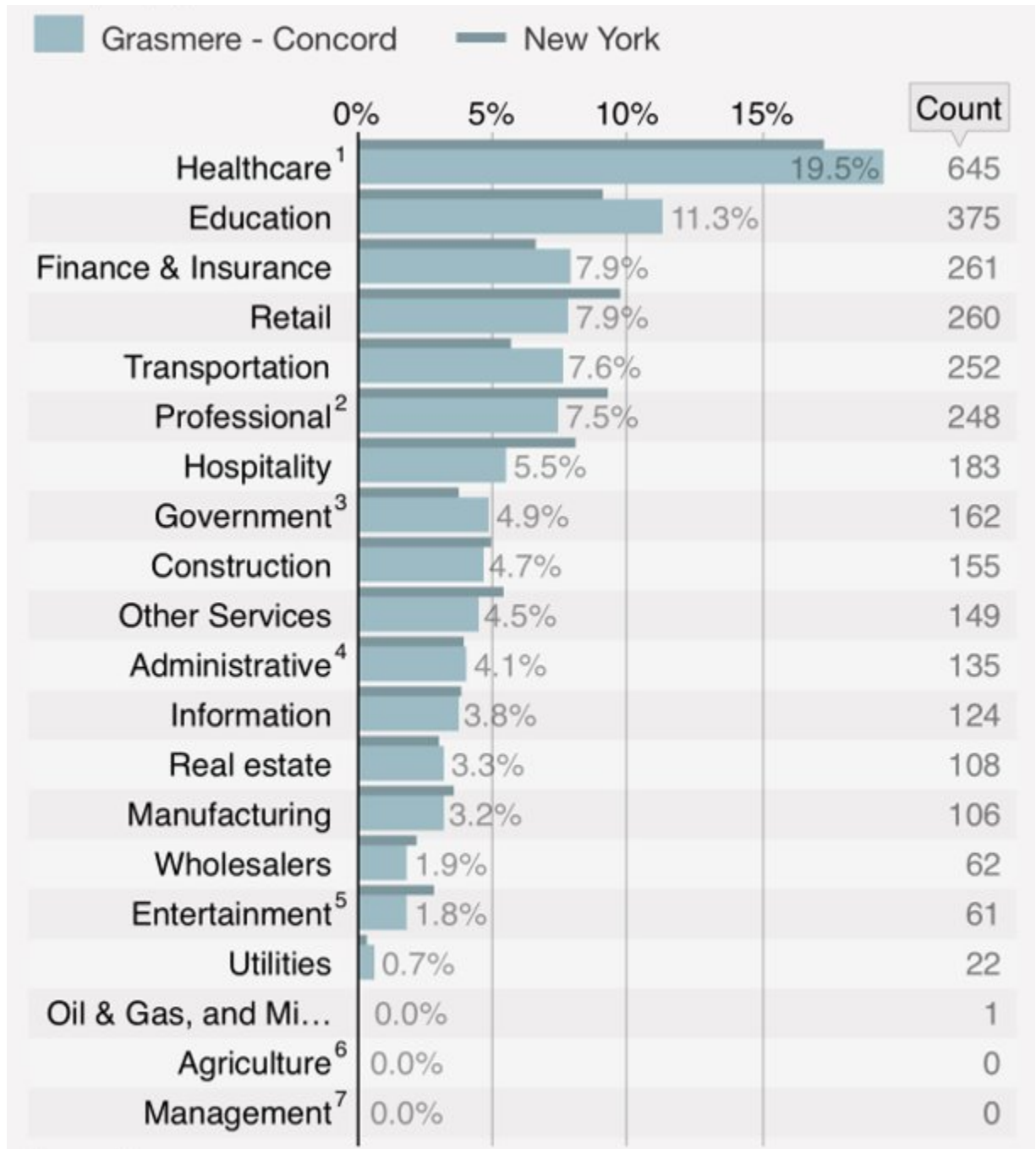


APPENDIX RESEARCH FIELD



APPENDIX 2

Different Types of Jobs in Staten Island



APPENDIX 3

Race and Ethnicities in Staten Island

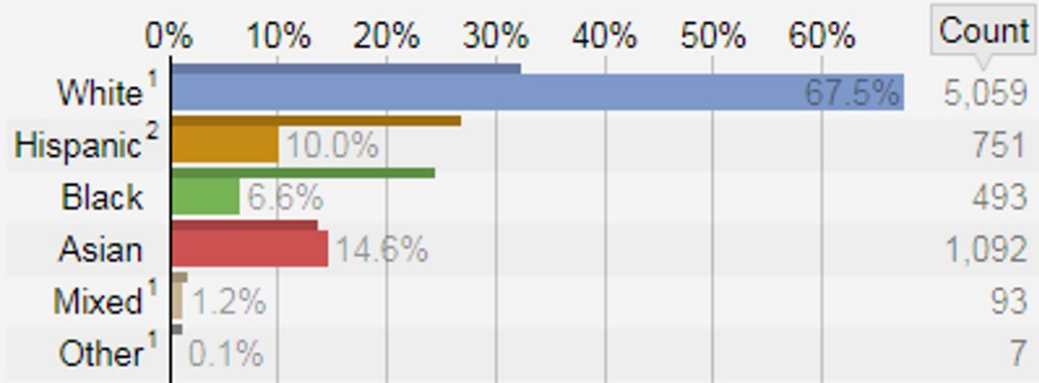
Race and Ethnicity

#1

Percentage of the total population.

Scope: population of New York and Grasmere - Concord

■ Grasmere - Concord ■ New York



Count number of members in ethno-racial group

¹ non-Hispanic

² excluding black and Asian Hispanics