

# Simple Surveys, Complex Answers.

The Business Enhancement Committee of Emporia Main Street has a unique position within the Main Street organization. To enhance our local business climate, we must study the wants and needs of our citizens AND THEN calculate how those wants and needs can translate into new business for our existing members, economic gaps for new businesses or if the wants of a few individuals simply cannot support a traditional business concept. Emporia Main Street is working with our local Emporia High School FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) to gather information about the market perceptions of local high school students. With a few hundred questionnaires returned, we have quite a bit of data left to sift through, but below are some of the emerging themes that we are gaining through the surveys.



**Aesthetics are VERY important-** Several of our respondents referred to the "cool" factor of businesses. Those that took the time to expand on what "cool" meant to them explained their concept aesthetically. While we may not want to continue to invest cash in updating our "look", outdated aesthetics can turn younger customers away.

**Variety counts-** Several respondents indicated that they were looking for clusters of several different businesses that met their demographic needs in one geographic area. The 13-18 age ranges has a clear view of what they wanted, and they don't want to wait for it. In other words, although the survey participants seemed to have an extraordinarily high degree of brand awareness, their answers seem to suggest a very low degree of brand loyalty. You can't relax your internal or external marketing for this group. If this age range fits your target demographic, you need to continually update yourself to remain "cool".

**The Entertainment Factor-** Most retailers I know want their customers to "turn over", meaning they want to get people in and out of their store while encouraging purchases. The high school students we surveyed indicated that they wanted a place to not only shop or eat, but to "hang out". The students seemed to blur the line between shopping and entertainment more than other groups in other surveys. So, beyond shopping or eating, there seems to be a "what else have you got" attitude that suggests the need for an underlying entertainment value. If this is a target market, find creative ways to fuse entertainment into your customer experience.

**Location is a Low Priority-** Although students want a pedestrian friendly cluster with complimentary businesses, they seem extremely mobile. Several students indicated bypassing closer markets to travel to more distant, much larger markets. Although Topeka was mentioned as an out-of-town destination, Kansas City and Wichita were mentioned at about the same rate, if not more. A high degree of mobility when coupled with low brand loyalty translate to a difficult market situation. In "gravity" based markets, drive time hold little relevance and "weight" is distributed based on the size of the market. Thus, higher population areas have a greater reach than a simple drive time would indicate. The surveys would indicate that we currently exist within other city's markets for the 13-18 demographic, which, if true for other demographic strata, would reinforce the need to concentrate on uniqueness within our market offerings and density within our developments.

**Online Shopping Continues to Rapidly Expand-** Clothing, shoes, music and sports equipment are the top four categories of on-line shopping indicated in our survey thus far. Younger individuals are shopping on-line at a much higher rate than previous generations, and this trend should continue with each subsequent generation. If you aren't on-line, you may be missing an opportunity to connect with a younger generation. Even if this younger group isn't your current demographic, they one day will be. Convenience, ability to price compare and the ability to find a world of items (increased variety) were all cited as reasons to shop on-line.

**Redevelopment Requests-** Some individuals voiced their opinions (*quite strongly in some instances*) about the need to redevelop certain areas of the community. I won't use the exact language in this forum (*it looks like we may have some future bloggers that took our survey*), but there seems to be some frustration in the communities capacity. Some of that is an aesthetics issue, some of that comes from the fact that these students are comparing Emporia to MUCH larger cities and some of the redevelopment issues stem from a combination of lack of clustering and a lack of perceived variety.

**Pride-** This is something that I suspected for quite some time, but I was never able to see raw data that supported my hypothesis until now. I come from a smaller area community (Lebo) that (*I felt*) had a lot of pride as I was growing up. Other smaller area communities like Olpe also seem to have significant pride in their town. The level of community pride within some of our younger students seems lacking. I'm not blaming the students for their opinions on the subject, and frankly some high school students are going to have a negative opinion of their community regardless of where they are from. But, based on responses I've seen, we need a coordinated effort to improve community pride that includes our younger generations. We should also be careful not to enter into campaigns that would reinforce negative perceptions within these younger groups. On an individual level, take the time to encourage a little community pride within our younger generations by telling them the interesting parts of our community. Our negativity tends to resonate with those that are growing up around us.

Emporia Main Street continues to compile data collected from the FBLA survey. We will continue to release more information as it becomes available. If you would like access to the full survey, and it's results, simply contact Emporia Main Street.

The vast majority of our Main Street members are smaller businesses, and their strength lies in their adaptability. Your ideas, creativity and motivation are a tremendous asset IF you can take your plans and make them a reality. Make a short list of some things you would like to do to improve your business, and then get them done! Play to your strengths, and realize that you have an organization in Emporia Main Street willing to help your business succeed.

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