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Sage Project Directors and Staff
Jessica Barlow, Program Director
Piper Whalen, Graphic Design Intern

About the Sage Project
The Sage Project is a partnership between San Diego State University (SDSU) and a city or government entity in the San Diego region. The mission of the program is to engage students from across the University in assisting a local government with projects that address their smart growth, quality of life, and sustainability goals. In the Sage Project, students have the opportunity to engage in meaningful real-world projects and make positive contributions to a community in SDSU’s service area. The program’s vision is to connect SDSU students and faculty with high-priority, high-need community projects, thereby generating interest and fresh ideas that create momentum and provide real service to the community. The Sage Project embodies the University’s commitment to serving local students, engaging alumni, and contributing to the public good by focusing thousands of hours of course-based student involvement with high-impact activities. The program is based on the highly successful and award-winning Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) at the University of Oregon and is a part of the SCYP network. National City, California, is the Sage Project’s 2013-2014 partner city. Participating courses come from the following disciplines: Anthropology; Audiology; City Planning; Civil Engineering; Communication; Geography; Graphic Design; Homeland Security; International Security and Conflict Resolution; Marketing; Political Science; Public Administration; Public Health; and Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences.
National City

National City is a highly urban community of about 60,000 residents in south San Diego Country (Refer to Figure 1). It is second oldest city in the county and boasts a rich history, a diverse community, and is known as one of the most walkable cities in San Diego County. Located just south of downtown San Diego and just north of the US-Mexico border, the city is flanked by freeways and is home to large-scale industries. National City is a mid-size city that faces big city challenges, and, like many municipalities, the city is challenged to meet community needs and new demands of sustainability. By providing new ideas and human capacity, this partnership with the Sage Project will help National City implement sustainability concepts and practices into projects that will improve livability.

Executive Summary

Big B Market & Deli is a convenience store located in National City. The majority of products inside of the store are snacks and beverages. The main goal behind their current retail strategy is to be a one-stop shop for the local community. Therefore, the store carries everyday necessities, such as laundry detergent, toiletries, and over-the-counter medicine. Since the majority of the food items in the convenience store are relatively unhealthy, Big B has partnered with the Sage Project in order to create a new retail marketing plan. The main goal is to provide the local community with healthy food options.

To begin, secondary research was conducted on prior corner store conversions to understand how Big B can make a transition towards selling healthy foods. The two major areas for a successful corner store conversion are implementation and promotion. A strategic selection and handling of perishable items is necessary to ensure financial success. In addition, advertisements and promotions of the new changes are essential for successful corner store conversion. Primary research was then conducted on two of Big B’s competitors to understand how the corner store can gain a competitive advantage. The two competitors that were analyzed are Cozines Liquor Market & Deli and Big Ben Market. Both stores are located near Big B. Cozines is five blocks (0.2 miles) northwest of Big B, and it is also considered a corner store. Big Ben is a grocery store and it is located 0.8 miles northeast of Big B.

Based on the research conducted, the first recommendation for Big B is to update and renovate the interior and exterior of the store. The inside can be strategically reorganized to increase profitability, and more importantly promote and sell healthy foods. In addition, the outside of the store is currently underutilized. There are many opportunities for using the outside of the store to increase sales, traffic flow, and community engagement.

The second recommendation is to select the optimal assortment of produce and other healthy items. To promote and sell fresh produce, Big B should display the items on fruit stands near the entrance of the store. Also, they should sell marinated meats that will appeal to the local community. Since Big B is a small store, bulk bins can be installed in order to efficiently and effectively utilize space. In addition, Big B can make smoothies at their deli to sell and promote healthy foods. To keep track of inventory and decrease holding costs, it is important for Big B to purchase an up-to-date POS system.

There are two recommended ways that Big B can source produce. The first is to lease out the exterior of the building to a local farmer, in order to have a farmers market. This is a cost-effective way to sell produce at the store without the hassle of handling and storing fresh produce. Another idea is to develop a strategic alliance with Big Ben Market. The strategic alliance should function in a way that allows Big B to source short shelf life items. In order for the strategic alliance to successfully function, it would have to increase profits for both stores.
Finally, it is recommended that Big B should implement an Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) plan to engage with customers. The idea is to use social media and other online platforms to increase awareness of the store and its new health concept, and to increase their appeal to the target market. The store needs to promote a health oriented image by using advertising, sales promotions, social media, online marketing, direct marketing, and public relations.

Introduction

During spring 2014, the Sage Project provided the students of Dr. Iana Castro’s MKTG372 Retail Marketing Methods course, at SDSU, the opportunity to create a new retail marketing plan for Big B Market & Deli. Big B is a corner store located in a small community of National City. The overall goal of the project is to improve Big B financially, while also ensuring that the store is able to provide the local community with healthy food options. Four teams of five students were formed to work on different aspects of the corner store conversion. The individual teams conducted a current retail strategy of Big B, the industry’s best practices, a competitor analysis, and recommendations based on a specific aspect of the corner store conversion. The areas of the retail marketing strategy that were addressed by the groups are Store Design, Merchandising, Strategic Alliance, and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). The research, ideas, and recommendations have been compiled to create an in depth retail marketing plan for Big B Market & Deli.

Big B Market & Deli

Big B Market & Deli is a corner store located in a neighborhood of National City, on the corner of Coolidge Avenue and West 16th street (Refer to Figure 2 & Figure 3). It serves as a convenience store for the local community. Big B is currently owned by Eddie (Refer to Figure 4), an extremely approachable and friendly person. In addition, Eddie has many friendships with customers and among the local community. Big B sells a variety of groceries, snacks, beverages, and other daily necessities. The inside of the store is small and compact, but the store contains four aisles, refrigerators, a deli counter, and product displays. The outside of the store contains two lots: one in front, by the entrance, and one behind the store. The front lot is tidy and clean. In addition, the sidewalk near the store is being remodeled by National City. The back lot contains overgrown brush and trash. The community surrounding Big B is a mixture of industrial businesses, schools, and homes. The household income in this community is considered one of the lowest in San Diego County. Also, National City struggles with health problems and unhealthy eating habits ("National City"). The goal of the new retail marketing plan is to implement a successful strategy that will provide the local community with healthy food options.

Figure 2 Big B Market & Deli

Figure 3 Front view of Big B

Figure 4 Eddie, Owner of Big B Market & Deli
Source: San Diego Union-Tribune
Current Retail Strategy

Big B’s current retail strategy is to provide a wide assortment of products with limited depth. Their goal is to be a one-stop shop for anyone in the neighborhood. Therefore, Eddie wants to provide his customers with items that one can purchase from a typical grocery store. For example, Big B sells such items as laundry detergent, over-the-counter medicine, and canned food. But the majority of the items in the store are snacks and beverages. In addition, Big B currently sells a limited amount of produce. The majority of the products are priced at a standard markup of 30%. In terms of payment, Big B accepts cash, credit and debit cards, as well as EBT. Their current target markets are children, nearby workers, and the local community. The store currently lacks an up-to-date POS system; therefore, Eddie places orders for inventory whenever he feels necessary. The inside of the store is small, compact, disorganized in some areas, and cluttered due to high levels of inventory. There is a water filling station located on the outside of the store. In addition, the exterior of the building contains several promotional signs for EBT, Lottery, soda, ice cream, and their deli counter (Refer to Figure 5). During the weekends, a food cart sells tacos on Big B’s front lot.

Industry Best Practices

Secondary research was conducted on prior corner store conversions that were successful. These corner stores were able to implement a retail marketing strategy that included healthy, fresh foods.

Sustainable and Successful Implementation

In order to be successful, the corner store’s infrastructure needs to be modified to properly store and display produce. Strong relationships with local farmers need to be established in order to obtain produce on a consistent basis. In addition, relationships need to be built between the store employees and customers. This will ensure that customer needs are being understood and met. It is important for the corner store to start out with a limited amount of perishable items that will sell quickly while the customer base is getting used to the changes. Additional items can be added to the store once there is a strong customer base and quick turnover of perishable items (“Healthy Corner”). According to the Cilantro and Lime Initiative stores, the bestselling produce items are oranges, lettuce, tomatoes, avocados, and cilantro (“Cilantro to Stores”). To ensure minimal spoiling of produce, the focus of new items should be on those with longer shelf lives. Knowledge and skills are needed to sell perishable items. Therefore, activities should be phased into action, allowing time for the owner to adjust to a demanding inventory. Also, it is essential to strategically stock culturally specific foods and ingredients that reflect the demographics of the local community (“Market Makeovers”).

Figure 5 Promotional Signs
Advertising and Promotion

To create awareness in the local community about the new healthy changes to the corner store, it is essential to implement successful advertisements and promotions. This can be done by posting adequate outdoor signage, sending out flyers around the neighborhood (homes, businesses, and schools), changing advertisements inside of the store, and by discounting prices at first to draw in customers (“Healthy Corner”). Employees can offer customers small samples of fruits and other healthy snacks to raise awareness and increase sales (“Healthy Corner”). In addition, informational brochures, such as recipes and nutrition facts, can be placed around the store and handed out to the public in order to educate the community (Sandoval).

Placement and displays of the produce and healthy foods play a major role in customer buying patterns and behavior. To draw attention to the new items, creatively display the fresh produce at the entrance of the store, and keep healthy items at eye level. This will promote the sales of healthier options because shopping is a “visual act” (The community). Poor displays, few items to select from, and low quality food can result in a lack of customer confidence in the store and its products (“Healthy Corner”). Owners can refer to the Sell Healthy Guide to help with product selection, pricing, display, promotion, marketing, equipment selection, and refrigeration (“Get Healthy Philly”). Also, store owners should collaborate with other organizations to raise awareness of the store and its changes in the local community (Winkler).

Competitor Analysis

Primary research was conducted to evaluate two of Big B’s competitors: Cozines Liquor Market & Deli and Big Ben Market. Cozines is considered direct competition because of its close proximity to Big B. In addition, they both are convenience stores; therefore, they both satisfy the same needs in the local community. On the other hand, Big Ben would be considered indirect competition because it is located almost a mile away from Big B. Also, Big Ben is a grocery store which provides customers with a wider and deeper assortment of goods.

Cozines Liquor Market & Deli

Cozines Liquor Market & Deli is a corner store located four blocks (0.2 miles) away from Big B. It is considered direct competition for Big B because they compete for the same customers within the local community. It is located at 401 Civic Center Drive in National City (Refer to Figure 6). Like Big B, their retail strategy is focused around being a quick and convenient one-stop shop. The majority of their inventory is snacks, beverages, and household items. Cozines is a larger store than Big B; therefore, they are able to carry a wider and deeper assortment of goods. Cozines currently sells a moderate selection of fruits and vegetables. Big B and Cozines have similar prices for items. In addition, Cozines offers their customers a variety of services, such as key duplication, money transfer, and ATM. Also, the exterior of their building is covered with promotional posters that advertise merchandise sold in the store.
Big Ben Market

Big Ben Market is located on 108 E 8th Street in National City (Refer to Figure 7). Their location is on a main street near the heart of National City; therefore, they have high traffic flow. Big Ben is a supermarket that offers an excellent selection of goods. In addition, they have a large dining patio outside of the building where customers can enjoy their meals. Big Ben mirrors, on a smaller scale, a Whole Foods store. It is a classy and affordable grocery store that fills the void of what National City needs. They have an up-to-date POS system which makes the store run efficiently and effectively. They sell many types of alcoholic beverages, including beers, spirits, and wines. They carry a wide variety of snacks, regular grocery items, and most importantly fresh produce and meat. Also, they have a full kitchen that prepares ready-to-go meals for their customers. The store features a high ceiling and hardwood floors. The produce sections are listed with the source of their produce. In addition, they have chalk boards as signs which provide an artistic and vintage mood. Different sections of the store are well organized and divided by different products. There is no clutter or confusion present, either inside or outside the store. Finally, Big Ben has a strong online presence. They have a website that promotes special events, specials of the week, recipes, and reward programs.

Recommendations

The goal of this project is to provide Big B with recommendations in order to conduct a successful corner store conversion. The key is to improve the local community’s overall access to healthy foods. The Store Design, Merchandising, Strategic Alliance, and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) plans have been created from different perspectives (different teams). Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that some of the recommendations may overlap or contradict each other.

Store Design

It is recommended to paint the exterior of the store a neutral taupe color with bright green accents. This color scheme conveys a natural and healthy image, and distinguishes the store from other corner stores. Replacing the door with a more upscale model will drastically improve the appearance of the store. A sign on the south and west facing rooftop of a cutout of the store name in the accent green will draw attention to the store and provide a clean and modern image. This is further aided by removing all advertising banners from the building, and replacing them with a painted sign on the south facing wall with clean and simple bullet notes of the store offerings, such as “Fresh produce; Hand crafted sandwiches; Snacks and drinks; Beer, wine and liquor; Accepts EBT.” On the left side of the west facing wall, a community message board will add interest and activity. A cork board with decorative trim invites community members to seek out local activities and events, many of which will be held at the store (Sandoval).

Big B currently has three layout sections inside the store: the main floor, the refrigerators, and the deli. The store design has potential updates that can increase efficiency and effectiveness. The main floor’s current layout of four center aisles is ideal, but can be improved with the use of uniform shelving units and by removing the bulky end caps. To maximize the profitability of the limited shelf space without cluttering the store, all products should be evaluated based on inventory turnover and profit per square foot to appropriately allot shelf space. Liquor, tobacco, and household products should be placed in designated areas to improve the store layout. The wall space behind the register should be reserved for liquor and tobacco products. Household products should be placed on the wall space behind and to the right of the coffee maker. The store should make increased use of overhead wall space for low turnover items, such as dried chilies and electronics (Refer to Figure 8). In each section novelty items should be stocked at eye level, while routine purchases should be stocked on the lowest shelves to increase impulse purchases.

The refrigerators along the walls of the store are utilized very effectively (Refer to Figure 9). The largest area for improvement lies in the walk-in refrigerator. This area is located behind the beverages that are stocked for customers. It is currently inefficient and improperly arranged. There are large quantities of beverages that are placed in the store around the corners of walkways. This lowers the amount of floor space, which
impedes customer traffic flow and decreases sales. To improve this situation, additional shelving units should be placed in the walk-in refrigerator. This will provide efficient storage of beverages behind the shelf on which the products will be presented to customers. This will reduce the large amount of wasted space inside the refrigerator and increase floor space in the store.

The last area of the store layout to be modified is the deli. Replacing the current deli counter with a lower counter will increase visibility and make the space more inviting for customers.

An efficient and effective store design will increase the amount of floor space within the store; thereby, adding more space for additional standing refrigerators that can hold perishables such as cottage cheese or sour cream.

The front lot of the store will receive a tremendous improvement after being repaved by the City of National City. Bike racks should be placed around the front lot of the store. This will provide a storage area for children who would like to enter the store. They should be constantly maintained and include aesthetically pleasing features such as flower baskets. This would create a positive image towards the store. Produce stands featuring non-refrigerated items should be placed on either side of the front door will hold non-refrigerated items and be wheeled inside the store at night for security (“Healthy Corner”). Three picnic tables placed on the corner of the front lot would create an inviting space for customers to enjoy their time, and should include aesthetic features such as inset flower baskets to promote the friendly image of the store (“Healthy Corner”).

The back lot, currently overlooked and not maintained, has a tremendous effect on the image of the store. The trash and overgrowth should be cleared immediately and maintained in the future. In addition, the fence around the back lot should be refurbished or replaced. Storage sheds can be placed in the back lot. This will allow for additional storage of dry goods and other nonperishable inventory. A community chalkboard placed in the back lot will mark the yard as a community space (Sandoval). Three additional picnic tables and a shade structure can be placed in the area. This will provide an area for community events. Container garden landscaping will make the space warm and inviting, while minimizing cost and upkeep. The entire back lot should be thought of as a community garden area, and events should be encouraged (Refer to Figure 10).
Merchandising
To better track inventory, Eddie should invest in an integrated POS system that will increase accountability and create a hassle free inventory system. For a small corner store, Big B can also benefit from a weekly inventory checklist. The checklist would include two to three categories per day, and management will physically count the amount of items on shelf and in stock. This will help Big B track product sales, turnover rate, shrinkage, and minimize theft. In regards to shelf space, products that have higher turnover should carry additional inventory to last longer, while slow moving items will be granted less space in order to create additional space for new items that will attract customers. Management will have to pay attention to how fast each SKU is moving and adjust the merchandise in accordance with demand. Shelving of merchandise is paramount to a corner store’s success. Complementary items should be located together or in close proximity. Big B should utilize simple, large, replaceable, and easy to read tags on the shelves. No products should be tagged with individual price tags; instead, the UPC codes should be utilized.

Big B should provide a selection of goods for anticipated demand and distance itself from fluctuations in demand. They should know when to order and how much to order so as to strike a balance between inventory investment and customer service. To achieve this, it is recommended to utilize a combination of a single-period inventory model and the basic economic order quantity (EOQ) model. A single-period inventory model is useful for items that are considered as one-time purchasing decisions, perishable items, and certain foods. EOQ will be helpful to determine what the optimal stocking level is and what the reorder point is for certain items. The EOQ model is designed to minimize holding and ordering costs.

The primary merchandising recommendation is to implement produce stands, which will be stationed outside of the store. The purpose behind this idea is to make the local community aware that Big B carries fresh produce. In addition, strategically placing the produce outside will transform the store’s image to a more inviting one; therefore, it will attract more members of the community into the store. Incorporating local farmers as sources for this merchandise will help bring the healthiest and freshest options to the community, while promoting business development in the San Diego region. This will give customers the opportunity to incorporate more nutritional foods into their daily diets, which will positively affect the general health of the community.

The produce stands should contain a wide selection of fruits, vegetables, and spices (Refer to Figure 11). In addition to the typical produce items, there should be fresh seasonal items displayed on the produce stands that vary across the seasons. This will allow local farmers to offer a variety of items throughout the year. The produce stands can be sub-leased to a local farmer who will be in charge of providing customer assistance and overseeing the stands for loss prevention. The farmer will help bag the items and answer any questions that the customers may have. Money exchange will occur between the customer and the local farmer. This alternative has the advantage of being more affordable for Big B, provided that Eddie will not have to hire or train additional employees to oversee the stand. In addition, Eddie will receive a rental fee for sub-leasing his lots. He will also not have to deal with burden of storing the items overnight. Having the produce stands outside will highlight the store’s healthy options, attract customers, and will result in customers making additional purchases inside of the store. To promote healthy foods when displaying merchandise, it is extremely important to place them at a higher level throughout the store. This will increase the awareness of healthy options towards customers.

<table>
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<th>Spices</th>
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<td>Oregano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Lettuce</td>
<td>Basil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pineapples</td>
<td>Celery</td>
<td>Cinnamon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papaya</td>
<td>Onions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangoes</td>
<td>Garlic</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chilies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11 Recommended items for produce stand
Recipe pamphlets should be added to the produce stands. This is an interactive way to make people aware of healthy food options. Giving recipes to customers will help implement healthy eating practices at home. In addition, they show the customers exactly how to use the produce that can be purchased at the store. Some recipes that can be included on the pamphlets are a fruit salad, fruit smoothie, salsa, summer salad, and taco salad (Refer to Figure 12, & Figure 13).

**Figure 12 Produce recipes**

1. **Fruit salad recipe:**
   Pineapple, mango, strawberry, banana, and lime
2. **Fruit Smoothie recipe:**
   All fruit available, with carrot and spinach
3. **Salsa recipe:**
   Cilantro, tomato, onions, and serranos all finely chopped, with lime, garlic powder, pepper, and salt
4. **Summer salad recipe:**
   Lettuce, cilantro, tomato, celery, green onions, strawberries, and lime
5. **Taco salad recipe:**
   Lettuce, cilantro, onion, tomato, carrots, green onions, lime, cheese, chili powder, and black beans, with marinated meat on top

**Figure 13 Taco salad recipe**

**Try Our Fresh Fiesta**

A delicious taco salad recipe that is perfect for a lazy afternoon or family fun!

**Ingredients:**
- Lettuce
- Cilantro
- 1 Onion
- 2 Tomatoes
- 2 Carrots
- 3 Green onions
- 2 Limes
- 1/2 Cup of cheese
- 1 Cup of black beans
- Chili Powder
- Marinated Meat

**Instructions:**
1. Boil black beans in water for 2 hours
2. Empty out water and add chili powder
3. Cut up all produce
4. Cook marinated meat for 8 minutes on a grill
5. Cut up meat
6. Mix produce in bowl
7. Put black beans in bowl
8. Add marinated meat on top
9. Add cheese Chili Powder
10. Top it off with fresh lime juice
Another merchandising option is to include fresh Hispanic-style marinated meat. This strategy provides healthier options to customers for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Having pre-marinated meat, as well as fresh produce, will encourage customers to purchase these products and prepare healthier meals. To reinforce its presence as a one-stop shop, providing easy access to fresh meat will eliminate the need for customers to visit an additional grocery store. Suggested marinated meats that Big B can carry are carne asada and pollo asado. To implement this strategy, Big B will need to get in contact and build a relationship with a meat supplier. It is extremely important to properly store and display fresh meat in order to reduce spoilage. Therefore, the marinated meat can be stored in the walk-in refrigerator and displayed at the deli. It is recommended to start out with a small inventory of marinated meat and adjust according to demand.

To effectively use space, it is possible to install several bulk bins inside of the store. The bins could merchandise black beans, pinto beans, white rice, mixed nuts, mixed dried fruit, and granola. These are all healthy options for home meals and snacks. The items for the bulk bins should be purchased in big quantities, making it cheaper for Eddie and the customers. The bins allow customers to pour the exact quantity that they desire. This strategy is an easy, non-perishable, and space-efficient recommendation. To implement this idea, the current fruit bins located by the entrance of Big B should be removed. This space can be used for adding the new bins. There should be two rows of three bins. The bins will be self-service, where people can use a scoop and plastic bag to add as much as they wish. There should be a scale next to the bins so the customers can serve themselves according to their own purchasing needs. Finally, the bags will be weighed at the register, by the cashier, and will be charged at a set rate per pound.

Another opportunity for Big B is to sell fresh smoothies at the deli counter. They are a quick, healthy, and refreshing mid-day or morning snack. This is a perfect option for local workers on their lunch or snack break. In addition, this strategy will encourage the local community to consume fruits and vegetables. It would be necessary for Eddie to purchase frozen mixed berries, frozen mangoes, honey, and spinach from a retailer that provides wholesale products. Other produce for the smoothies, like apples, can be used from the produce stands. This idea can reduce spoilage of fresh produce because the items that are beginning to overripe can be added to the smoothies. The corner store would need to add a small freezer behind the deli, where all of the frozen items will be kept (Refer to Figure 14).

![Figure 14 Smoothie recipes](image1)

1. Fruit salad recipe:
Pineapple, mango, strawberry, banana, and lime
2. Fruit Smoothie recipe:
All fruit available, with carrot and spinach
3. Salsa recipe:
Cilantro, tomato, onions, and serranos all finely chopped, with lime, garlic powder, pepper, and salt
4. Summer salad recipe:
Lettuce, cilantro, tomato, celery, green onions, strawberries, and lime
5. Taco salad recipe:
Lettuce, cilantro, onion, tomato, carrots, green onions, lime, cheese, chili powder, and black beans, with marinated meat on top
Strategic Alliance

Currently, Big B sources all of its perishable products through vendors and wholesalers. Therefore, another possibility for Big B is to source produce, and other short shelf life items, from Big Ben. The strategy is to create a strategic alliance between Big Ben and Big B. Through a strategic alliance Big B can quickly replenish items, because Big Ben is located less than a mile away. To make this strategic alliance function, it would have to be a win-win situation for both stores. Big B would have to focus on its core competency, which is a convenience store, where people can purchase a small amount of items quickly and easily. On the other hand, Big Ben would also have to focus on its core competency, which is a grocery store, where customers can purchase a lot of items.

Some of the reasons why Big Ben should partner with Big B are to sell their products at multiple locations, introduce new products, increase their market size, and promote their store. First, Big Ben would be able to sell produce, and other short shelf life items, at Big B. This would extend their reach to their target market because customers could simply go to Big B to purchase Big Ben items. Secondly, they could test new products at Big B’s location. These items could be targeted specifically to the demographics near Big B, such as children, because there are several schools located nearby. For example, they can sell breakfast burritos during the morning when children are walking to school. In addition, Big Ben can increase their market size. Therefore, they can increase their sales and revenue. Finally, Big Ben can promote their store at Big B. The main idea behind the promotion is to inform customers to shop at Big Ben if they want to go to a grocery store.

On the other hand, the reasons why Big B should partner with Big Ben is to increase cash flow and profits, source fresh produce, increase foot traffic, and improve their overall image and inventory. Big B can increase cash flow and profits if they rent out sections of their store to Big Ben. In addition, Big B can increase their revenue if they rent out the exterior (front and back) of their property for a Big Ben farmers market. The main reason why Big B should partner with Big Ben is to source products that have short shelf lives, such as milk, eggs, produce, and ready-to-eat sandwiches. Also, by selling these products and having such events Big B will increase foot traffic inside of their store. This will increase the sales of convenience store items such as cigarettes, snacks, and sodas. Finally, creating a strategic alliance will help improve the store’s image because of the positive association between Big B and Big Ben in the mind of consumers.

In order for the strategic alliance to function smoothly, there would have to be a signed contract between both stores. First, both businesses must stay independent of each other. In addition, both businesses need to focus on their core competency. Big B should remain a convenience store that offers a wide and shallow assortment of items. On the other hand, Big Ben needs to focus on being a grocery store that offers wide and deep assortment of goods. To keep track of inventory, Big B has to purchase an up-to-date POS system that can track the sales of specific items that Big Ben supplies. Also, Big Ben would have to supply high quality products. To enter products into Big B’s location, Big Ben should lease out space inside and outside of the store. Therefore, all of the money from selling Big Ben products at Big B goes to Big Ben. A small section of the Big B store should locate a refrigerator labeled “Big Ben Express.” This refrigerator should sell fresh fruits and vegetables, salads, sandwiches, milk, and eggs. In addition, Big Ben can hold farmers markets on the front and back lot of Big B.

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)

The primary objectives of the Integrated Marketing Communication plan are to increase awareness of Big B and its new health concept, and to increase their appeal to the target market. The store can promote awareness of a health-oriented image by using advertising, sales promotion, social media, online marketing, direct marketing, and public relations. This campaign would target the Hispanic families in the surrounding neighborhood, and more specifically, mothers and children. It is extremely important to target mothers because they typically are the ones who create the shopping list (“Integrated Marketing Communications”). Furthermore, Big B is located near Kimball Elementary School, John A. Otis Elementary School, and National City Middle School. Thus, Big B can create a health oriented presence in the community by targeting the children in the neighborhood and promoting a healthy lifestyle. By working with nearby schools, Big B can gain goodwill and recognition as an active contributor to the community. The creative IMC strategies that should be employed to achieve the primary marketing objective are advertising, sales promotions, social media, online marketing, direct marketing, and public relations.

Creative execution

Advertising

Currently Big B does not employ any advertising in any media. Advertising is crucial to achieving the primary marketing objectives. Therefore, Big B should place advertisements in newspapers because no other advertising vehicle has the reach of newspapers. In addition, newspapers add credibility and can be targeted to a certain area (“Top Ten Reasons to Advertise in Newspapers”). Since Big B’s target market is the Hispanic families that live near the store, they can reach their target market by advertising in Star News, the local National City newspaper, and El Latino (a popular Spanish newspaper). The newspaper advertisements would inform the readers about Big B’s deli, farmers market, and fresh produce. The advertisements would also offer a coupon that provides a discount for the deli. The coupon will provide an incentive for readers to go to the store and try the deli. Big B can also advertise on the radio to build awareness as a health-oriented neighborhood store. Once again, the advertisement can be catered to a specified target market by airing the radio advertisement on local Hispanic radio stations. The radio advertisements, like the newspaper advertisements, will be used to spread awareness and inform the listeners of Big B’s position as a health-oriented neighborhood store. The radio also has a high reach and is a quick way to spread information.
Sales Promotion

The advertisements in newspapers and radio will help spread awareness of Big B’s new concept and draw people into the store. However, Big B will need to implement sales promotions in order to increase sales. Big B can promote sales by using prominent ‘on sale’ or ‘special discount’ signs for various products. Also, Big B can place products that are on sale near the front of the store to make them stand out. In order to be aligned with the healthy concept, signs that promote the selling of soda, alcohol, or junk food should not be used. Big B can also promote sales by offering a frequent buyer card for the deli. For example, when a customer buys nine items from the deli they get the tenth one for free. This gives customers an incentive to buy more, thus promoting sales. In addition, this will benefit Big B in the long run by building customer loyalty.

Online Marketing

Since the rapid evolution of the internet, many companies are embracing an online presence because of the ability to be interactive. Originally, websites were used only to inform consumers. Now websites have the ability to promote brand image, to position, offer promotions, product information, and products and services for sale (Belch, 2014). The Internet serves two purposes in marketing. It can be used as a communication medium in order to create awareness, provide information, and influence attitudes. It also can serve as a direct response medium in order to receive immediate feedback and input from consumers. Big B can take advantage of both purposes with an online website. The website can be informative in order to create awareness, provide information, and influence attitudes. The website would also feature a “Recipe of the Day” that would show a new, quick and easy recipe made from ingredients that can be purchased from Big B. These recipes can be the same or similar to the recipes provided in the store. This makes the website interactive and contributes to the image that Big B is a convenient store that offers fresh produce. The website will also allow customers to give feedback on the store and recipes, in order for Big B to better understand customer wants and needs.

Social Media

It is recommended that Big B implement a social media strategy consisting of Facebook, Instagram, and Yelp. Social media is a huge presence in society. The combination of the three social media platforms will help Big B reach their target market and raise awareness. Social media is also a great tool to implement because it requires little to no cost, so it is valuable for companies that have a limited advertising budget. “This type of social marketing has been used in a market makeover intervention conducted in East Los Angeles, California, and has proven very popular with community members” (Public Matters, 2012). Marketers believe Facebook is a “must have” medium because it is the largest of all social networks with over 1 billion subscribers worldwide (Belch, 2014). In addition, it is one of the easiest, quickest, and most cost-effective ways to gain brand exposure (Belch, 2014). Thus, it is recommended for Big B to create a Facebook page that provides information about the store and its new offerings. Big B can use Facebook by posting information about current sales, providing a “Recipe of the Day”, and sharing relevant healthy facts in order to educate the community. Big B can also help spread awareness about its store by giving a discount at the deli if a customer “checks-in” to Big B on Facebook. The check-in will appear on the customer’s news feed, which is available for all of the customer’s Facebook friends to see, thus spreading awareness.

Big B can also use Instagram to generate involvement from its customers. Instagram is used more often by women and teenagers, so it will reach Big B’s target market (Belch, 2014). Big B should initiate a contest on Instagram to engage its customers by having them post pictures of themselves making the recipe of the day. In order to track the contest, customers will be asked to use #bigbreceipeoftheday, and a random winner will be selected once a week to receive a gift card or a discount at the store. In addition to the contest, Big B should also provide constant posts on Instagram about current sales, healthy facts, and upcoming events to increase awareness. These posts could use the hashtags #bigb, #healthyeating, #marketanddeli, #nationality, and #freshproduce in order to increase exposure. Big B can use Instagram to its advantage by posting up-to-date high quality images to visually stimulate the customers. Along with Facebook and Instagram, Big B should utilize Yelp to generate awareness and engage customers. Yelp is an essential tool to attract new customers to Big B because Yelp can help spread positive word-of-mouth. Since the reviews are written by other customers and not the employees of the business, there is relatively high credibility towards Yelp. In addition, it can create a positive perception of the store. Yelp can also be used to draw new customers into the store by providing a discount when they “check-in” to Big B.

Direct Marketing

In a highly competitive and saturated market, it is essential for Big B to use different marketing techniques and strategies. Direct marketing involves direct response, mailing marketing, and anything else that makes the business stand out and gain attention. The first and most effective way to do so is by mailing out postcards with coupons or promotional codes.

Public Relations

Investing in public relations is a crucial aspect that Big B should focus on. It would be beneficial to partner up with neighborhood schools and offer presentations and seminars on eating healthy. Also, allocating some of Big B’s back lot to the community so that children from the neighborhood can help grow flowers or produce would help its public relations. Lastly, children are a crucial part of this project, so they should help with the decorations by adding their handprints to ceramic tiles located around the premises. Sometimes public relation efforts are made to influence the public. With this in mind, catering healthy foods from the deli to the nearby schools would be extremely beneficial because it an easy way to provide healthy foods to the local community and raise awareness.
Conclusion

There are many improvements that can be made to Big B in order to increase profits, while providing the local community access to healthy, fresh foods. It is important to understand that Big B has to successfully differentiate itself from competition in order to gain market share. In addition, in order to be prosperous, Big B should create a new retail marketing plan that incorporates lessons learned from previous corner store conversions. Through a strategic combination of a new store design, merchandising procedure, sourcing of fresh products, and an integrated marketing communication plan, Big B will be able to raise awareness, and increase foot traffic and sales.
Works Cited
Employee #1: Supervisor at Big Ben Market. National City, San Diego, CA