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Downtown Dubuque Main Street Retail Survey

Our group explored the store fronts of Downtown Dubuque on Main Street between 1st street and 4th street. We walked around the district and wrote our quick impressions for the storefronts. Afterwards we each picked one store and went into a detailed observation about it.

The first store was explored by Steven McDonough: The first store we looked at was Corked. This store is designated for women, mature to middle aged women. The store is perfectly positioned to cater to foot traffic and tourists who make their way down Main St. Corked targets their business towards those who are in higher income levels. This is illustrated by the store’s “boutique” appearance and environment. They carry a variety of specialty items, offering a selection of chocolate, wine, crafted beer, and gelato. The first impression that is derived from Corked is one of a boutique. They exhibit a store that offers special items or one that carries products not regularly found in similar stores. We came to find that they offer these products in addition to being a restaurant and lounge. This was something that would not be inferred by consumers based on the appearance of the shop. It is portrayed more as a café or specialty boutique.

The three best elements of the store window are the: large window, awning sign with a few available products clearly listed, and hanging window plants. These three elements also happen to be the most noticeable observations when first looking to inquire more about the local shop. The large window allows potential customers to peer into the window to make a better decision about whether to enter the store or to continue passing by. When taking a moment to glance into the store customers are welcomed by the sight of a chocolate display and a warm welcoming environment waiting inside. The awning sign above the store clearly points out what this store has to offer. It is done with an elegant design which sparks a sense of curiosity for the consumer. The sign has enough information to inform of their products, but leaves more to be discovered inside. The plants on the windows provide a homely touch and create a welcoming mood. It signifies that the store is well kept and receives enough attention and effort to keep the plants in good condition throughout the year. It is one of the first indicators that the store is worth going inside.

The three worst elements of the window front are the multiple doors, its proximity to tavern, and connection to Chocolaterie Stam. The multiple doors and the absence of a clearly marked entrance could cause trouble to those looking to go inside. This was something we witnessed first-hand during our encounter with the store. The proximity to the tavern takes away some of the foot traffic that would be received with another location. The bar’s active hours would not correlate with the operating hours of Corked and therefore they will not help to bring attention to the surrounding businesses. Corked is associated/affiliated with Chocolaterie Stam. This could lead to some confusion amongst customers who wish to go inside one store and not the other. The two different shops are not distinctively marked and share common entrances. I would improve the store front by addressing the negative elements of the store. Eliminate some of the doors that seem to lead to the store and have a clearly marked entrance. This will make it as easy as possible for consumers to enter the store.

The next store that we visited was the Mission Thrift Store which Ayush Joshi talks about: The store was located at 398 Main Street. The store’s target market is mainly people with lower income since all the products sold there are used and not new. Observing the location of the store i.e. downtown Dubuque, we can infer that the store wants to attract people from the city. Also, they had mostly electronics, furniture, old clothes, shoes etc. The store didn’t seem to target just one gender; both women and men could shop there. I don’t think the store has a definite target market in terms of age. They have products suitable from young kids to old people over 60 years.

Our first impression of the store started as so, the shop keeper greeted us warmly and as we entered the store my eyes fell on some furniture which were priced pretty low. I thought I could find more stuff for great bargain which made me a little happy. Eventually I could also see T.V. sets for sale. As I went deeper into the store I could see ceramics, books, and other decoration items. Almost when I thought I had seen everything, I discovered that there were more items for sale in the basement of the store as well. There were shoes, clothes, bowling ball, crutches, humidifiers etc. Some of the items were in decent condition and definitely good buys. The three best parts were:

1. Furniture: They were in good condition and were priced quite reasonably. They had dinner tables, chairs and also couches.
2. Hidden Treasure: There were some antiques in the store that could be of great value to some people. For instance, I was pretty fascinated by the old calculator that was present there which probably weighed over 5 pounds.
3. Shop Keeper: He was friendly and never seemed fazed when asked for help with anything related to the items in the store.

However the worst elements were

1. Window: It seemed uninteresting. The title of the store read just ‘Thrift Store’ and nothing else. There were no advertising of what were being sold inside the store.
2. Price Labeling: The items besides the furniture and TV didn’t have price labeling, so it was difficult to pick items while trying to be conscious of the budget. It was inconvenient to ask the shop keeper for the price of different items we picked up every now and then.
3. Customer Service: No one was there to help us get info of the items that were being sold. We had to go all the way to the shopkeeper at the front of the store to get any sort of information.

If I was going to improve the storefront I would first put up an attractive window for the store rather than just displaying a sign saying ‘Thrift Store’ Then I would probably categorize items properly so that customers have ease in finding what they want. I would also hire a couple of staff to help customers if they have any inquires about the items being sold. Finally, I would put a price label on each item or at least on each category of items so that customers can shop within their budget.

Next Kyle Kirchoff explored HJ’s Fashion Emporium: The store I chose to talk about is HJ's Fashion Emporium. It is located at 241 Main Street, Dubuque, IA 52001. Looking at the outside of this store, I felt that it was more targeted towards women mainly because it had pictures of women in the window and they had women’s shoes in the window. Something that also caught my eye was the bright colors that had and the star-like ornaments hanging. The display seemed more female oriented to me and seemed to market somewhat older women. I felt the target market was older than college girls and I would say marketed towards women around the age of 30 and up. When I walked up, the first thing I noticed was the HJ’s sign. It is pretty noticeable as it is a good sized sign that hangs above the door. I think noticed the nice flower pot that is on the railing to the door. After my initial glance over the store I noticed it just did not have one store window it had multiple. I almost thought they were different stores because one window had shoes another some clothes.

I think some of the best elements of the store were the fact that it was on Main Street. Main Street, I feel like is a good place for people to do a little shopping on a nice day on the weekend. Another thing I liked was that it seems like it had been there for years and years and years with the design of the building itself and the way it was decorated. Last thing that I liked about HJ’s was that it seemed like an old ma and pop store and you would go in there and they would already know your name. I guess it had that kind of inviting, friendly feeling.

Something that I didn’t like was the at first glance it seemed like a very small store. It took me a second to realize that it was actually bigger than it appeared. Also I didn’t like the fact that the store was right next to a bar. It only takes one drunken person to do something stupid and ruin the nice display outside of the store. That is the only real improvements I feel HJ’s should do, though there is really nothing they can do unless they move to a different location.

Lastly Bo Anderson checked out Mason Dixon Saloon: The next place we inspected was Mason Dixon Saloon. This bar is also referred to as Mason Dixon or just Mason. The bar is located between 1st and 2nd street on the west side of Main Street. The address is 163 Main St. The bar has a tattoo parlor on one side and a barbershop on the other side. In the general vicinity though are other bars and restaurants which helps attract traffic especially during the weekend. The bar is designed to appeal to college and middle aged patrons, with a lean towards males. From the front windows you can see several TVs right away which one would only assume are often playing sports. It has a laid-back atmosphere and serves food during the day while be part of the Main Street bar scene on Friday & Saturday nights.

When talking about the first impression Mason Dixon gives people it is important to mention that they might not get one. Mason looks very plain from the front. It’s a brick building with two large glass windows. If somebody was walking past Mason Dixon while busy they could definitely miss it. If a passer-by did stop to look they would see more though. The large windows expose the entire length of the bar and they make it very easy to see the lively celebrations going on inside. Beside the normal neon beer signs is an Iowa Hawkeyes banner hanging on the window. This is a positive for Mason, Dubuque is located right where Wisconsin, Illinois & Iowa meet and many residents/students are originally from the central part of one of those states. People from Illinois root very strongly for Chicago teams (Bears, Cubs, White Sox, Bulls, etc.) and people from Wisconsin are crazy for the Packers and to a lesser degree other Wisconsin teams. Being labeled a Packers or Bears bar could push away a large chunk of possible patrons, both neither Illinois or Wisconsin follows college sports as closely as Iowa. Mason Dixon can appeal to Iowa fans without necessarily offending anybody by hanging Iowa signs and banners. The three best parts of the store front are the large windows that help invite people in, the Hawkeye banner which may help with bringing people in to eat and drink on game days and also Mason Dixon has a sign fashioned in the old sense that it hangs at a right angle from the building, it’s unique and it stands out for a bar. The three worst elements are; the name of the bar and the image used on the Bar Sign, Mason Dixon conjures up images of the South and a country type bar and this bar is anything but that so the name is misleading, the plain front design which doesn’t arouse curiosity and the inner store layout, from the window the bar looks much smaller than it is because outsiders cannot see the staircase to the basement.

Improving the store front of Mason Dixon could involve a change in imagery on the sign. The current logo is a bull’s head colored like a confederate flag which paints a very different picture of what the bar will be compared to what it is. More effective imagery might be to use the Mason Dixon line reference as a place that all can meet and put aside differences over a drink, “Where North meets South at Happy Hour”. Going with that the front could be remodeled to look more like an old saloon but still have modern elements which would stick out and catch the eye of people passing by. Overall we rate Mason Dixon as having an okay store front.

Overall the Downtown Dubuque district is well populated with a wide assortment of shops and restaurants. Overall we felt that the shops that did best were those that could stick out from the shops surrounding them. Unique features were useful and large beautiful window displays helped. Some of the shops we felt did worse were those that seemed to have confusing layouts like Corked where it was hard to actually understand how to get into the building, many of these shops may be dealing with the consequences of many Main Street buildings being so old and now being used for other purposes than their original/intended purpose.