



Gibsonville Marketing Analysis

Presented to the Town of Gibsonville and the downtown business community on February 12,
2019

On behalf of the Town of Gibsonville, North Carolina

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Marketing Analysis Report

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Executive Summary

The marketing analysis below concluded that, overall, the businesses in Gibsonville have identified and utilize effective methods to market to their individual customer base. However, the following recommendations are made in order to draw a greater audience to downtown Gibsonville, reach and attract surrounding demographics and encourage cross-promotion and customer sharing between businesses.

- Overall recommendation 1: Encourage more businesses to use Instagram. There is a missing market segment that Gibsonville is not reaching (e.g. Elon University, young professionals, etc.) that can be found by prioritizing this medium.
- Overall recommendation 2: Establish town-wide branding to channel momentum to not only the individual businesses or subgroups, but to the overall downtown.

Introduction

Motley was commissioned to evaluate and create a baseline of understanding on the level of reach and engagement through current channels of marketing for indicating businesses in Gibsonville. This baseline would then act as a launchpad to build future marketing strategies. Through observing and analyzing Gibsonville's marketing presence through the selected 10 strategic, pillar businesses and considering the selected town entities, we have identified a baseline to elevate marketing in the community. The goal of this analysis and its implementation is to increase foot traffic and engagement from Gibsonville residents and the greater community.

This analysis was completed with the understanding that 'fresh eyes' could locate some of the ways that Gibsonville might be missing connections and identifying ways that current efforts are succeeding or missing the mark. Our team sought to assess the present downtown business community and the ways they were advancing the identified brand statements, as well as analyzing the ways in which the brand of Gibsonville has evolved.

Community Analysis

Gibsonville is well-positioned, being five minutes away from Elon University, less than 10 minutes away from Burlington and has a population of over 1.4 million accessible to downtown Gibsonville within a 25-mile radius.¹ If residents are not visiting or patronizing downtown, it is because they are unaware of the products and services that are available. We have found that downtown businesses, by and large, do not market to Gibsonville or the surrounding community. The majority of Once Upon a Chocolate, Burke Manor Inn, Gibsonville Antiques, and other downtown businesses serve a customer base that is outside of the city/county limits and even outside the state. This base ranges from 80% down to 40% of their primary market being outside of the direct Gibsonville community. Therefore, the foot traffic to their storefront and the activation of downtown is not imperative to these businesses. The success of the company is taken onto the owners' shoulders to obtain sales in the quickest, cheapest way possible (i.e. out-of-town visitors or Gibsonville residents).

With this being said, businesses are not necessarily looking to bring local traffic to downtown Gibsonville. For some, it is just an added bonus. It is a huge asset to Gibsonville that there are so many attracted out-of-town customers, but there is a need to elevate other businesses and the overall downtown experience. There is also a need to better market locally in order to reach the Elon, Burlington, Whitsett, Gibsonville and other local communities. There are unique treasures and boutique businesses in downtown Gibsonville. We have found a need for an overarching way to market the assets in Gibsonville without putting it on the individual

¹ Population statistic taken from StatsAmerica.org, supported from the U.S. Economic Development Administration

businesses' shoulders. The businesses' individual findings can be found below. Upon first sight, our impression was that marketing needed to drastically increase and shift because there was very few foot traffic sales around downtown Gibsonville. Businesses do not participate in cross-promotion often, therefore, missing a crucial opportunity. However, businesses have found a way to self-sustain. They often take advantage of Gibsonville's below market rate rent to gain the greatest profit margin for their businesses.

Downtown Gibsonville has built infrastructure with the potential to attract customers, encourage foot traffic and elevate downtown. Built infrastructure (buildings, sidewalks, roads, plumbing, electrical capabilities, etc.) is meant to attract businesses and activate downtown Gibsonville with patrons. Public restrooms and parking are part of the bigger picture that is already in place to host a greater influx of walking traffic and events, as well as acting as an attraction for new businesses to move or open downtown. There are green spaces and public spaces for festivals and city events to activate. Sidewalks are in good repair and city roadways are well-maintained. The street lights give a safe and quaint feeling to the downtown experience. The infrastructure and beauty of the old buildings lend to an aesthetically pleasing downtown visit. The sidewalks and streets are clean and trash cans are well-placed and kept.

Secret Shopping and Target Market

Through our secret shopping experience, we were blown away with the quality and content of businesses in downtown Gibsonville. From a 4-diamond french cuisine restaurant, to chocolate sculptures in storefronts, to artisan tattoo studios, there is an incredible variety and quality in offerings in Gibsonville. There is truly a disconnect in the marketing that is released by the town and the businesses and the quality of activities/products and services found in downtown. Our team secret shopped downtown in December and then again in January. We were downtown during the Christmas parade, the Lighting of the Greens and various pre-holiday and post-holiday shopping mornings, afternoons and evenings. The downtown itself was charming and inviting. Many storefronts participated in the holiday season by decorating their storefront/facade that elevated the downtown experience. We found that, for the most part, the storefront businesses downtown were friendly, inviting and interested in chatting with patrons. There was only one storefront that we visited where the owner/shopkeeper was nowhere to be seen. Some shops downtown even had hot chocolate, coffee, cake and cookies available to make the shopping experience the best that it can be.

We have found that the majority of businesses are fairly disjointed in Gibsonville. For example, many storefront owners have printed material for other industry-specific shops in the surrounding area, but do not have any sort of information surrounding local businesses that may not have a supporting product or service. There is a large possibility that people do not know that there is an ice cream shop, several restaurants, and more shops just across the street.

As identified in the Downtown Gibsonville Promotions Report completed in 2015, Gibsonville is:

- Off the beaten path with a relaxed pace of living for families and retirees, where people feel comfortable as they casually enjoy the pedestrian-friendly downtown.
- A historic mill town located on the border of Alamance and Guilford counties with access to more urban areas, but far enough away to keep the quaint charm of small town living.
- Someplace where people will give you a smile, wave, or helping hand.
- A unique collection of locally owned shopping and dining experiences to satisfy many tastes and budgets, plus custom services as well.
- A traditional town with parades, free outdoor concerts, markets, and community recreation activities.
- Where you meet old friends and make new ones.

The claims of the promotions report were confirmed by our team's findings. The only further finding from our team was that the business community is friendly and local, but does not necessarily take the extra step to ensure a customer's full experience of the downtown. The concerned experience ends with their business.

With that said, there are seemingly three subgroups of local businesses. They each operate differently as far as getting out the message about downtown Gibsonville and their business, and their business neighbors. This is a loose grouping of the actual storefronts and how it is perceived in the overall Gibsonville community and downtown landscape, excluding online sales and other partnerships.

The first subgroup of businesses serves a highly affluent customer base. Their customers come to Gibsonville for their businesses and their businesses only. They are drawn into downtown because there is very little competition in the area for their services/product. Wade's Jewelers, The Diamond Room and The Burke Manor all fit into this category. Saint Jacques and Posh Paws would also fit into this subgroup. There is very little sharing of customers from this group with the local retail options.

The second subgroup of businesses is the antique tourism and makers businesses. Gibsonville Antiques is the head of this subgroup but is also supported by Handy Nandy's Crafting and Supply Shop, The Hardware Store, Once Upon a Chocolate and Sandy's on Main. This subgroup is patronized by community members but also has customers who travel to visit their shops or order online. For the majority, they do not share customers with the first subgroup.

The third subgroup is the 'around towners'. The businesses in this subgroup are patronized by the community residents and have the most loyal and/or frequent following. This includes Pete's, Kimbers, Jack's, La Casa Dorada Mexican Restaurant, Tony's Shed, Reno's Pizza, Forever Flowers, Arrangements Flower Shop and Frank's Lounge.

There is a grouping of new businesses that fit the identified growth trajectory in Gibsonville to attract working young professionals. These businesses include Kevin Ray Tattoos and The

Buzz. There are also several businesses who have the potential to fall into this category as they embrace an additional demographic with a changing market. These businesses will bring customers in that can span all three subgroups of businesses in downtown Gibsonville, as well as elevate incoming businesses as Gibsonville grows.

We even found that some of these businesses were undervalued and often received a negative connotation within the community. For instance, Gibsonville's most-followed business is Kevin Ray Tattoo (@kevinraytattoos). Kevin has more than 64,800 followers on Instagram. Since January 15th, 2019, he has posted about people coming from Durham, Boone, Havelock, Ohio, Greensboro, Charlotte, Utah, Sanford, Raleigh, Charleston & Spartanburg, SC, Alberta, Canada and Virginia.

These long-distance visitors are likely customers for Gibsonville businesses. The key is to bring together these unusual experiences and highlight them in one central area to leverage continuity to downtown Gibsonville. Downtown should be known as a place to get tattoos, grab a beer, shop for antiques, grab pizza, get a haircut, get ice cream and play pool. This could be a reality through a town-wide marketing campaign to connect these unique businesses.

Business Report Out

Several suggestions in this report include the addition of more frequent postings on social media platforms. Our primary suggestions include Instagram and Facebook. These two are highly suggested because businesses can reach a wide variety of the surrounding community members through these platforms and they are free to use. Just under half of the businesses in the study presently use Instagram as a means of marketing. Instagram is a great tool, especially for reaching a younger demographic in the Triangle, Triad and Elon University areas. This platform is easy-to-use, requires minimal time to manage and ranges from being free to a low cost to outsource. The potential market reach that Instagram allows rivals a commercial and is available at a significantly lower cost. These platforms also allow for other bigger accounts to share and use content as their own to increase the visibility of Gibsonville and its offerings (e.g. Our State, Visit Alamance, Visit NC).

1. Burke Manor Inn

The Burke Manor Inn's Instagram was established on November 13, 2015. They have 344 followers, are tagged in 63 photos, and have 327 geotagged photos to their location. Their posts on Instagram are consistent and frequent, yet lack engagement from followers with a low number of likes and comments. The Burke Manor Inn has the unique opportunity to utilize user-generated content from users who have stayed at Burke Manor and tagged their location.

The Burke Manor Facebook page has 1,382 likes with a 4.7 out of 5 rating based on 90 reviews written by customers. They post regularly (at least once a week), with a decent level of

engagement. They also share a well-curated mix of photos, videos, links to articles and affiliated events. The Burke Manor website is clear and easy to navigate. It could use updating in terms of graphics, photos, and visual elements, but overall, the website conveys the information any potential guest would need. Through our interview process, we learned that they recently contracted with Main Street Hub to start posting on all social media to garner more consistency.

As far as paid engagement, The Burke Manor Inn utilizes various advertising methods including Clear Channel (Greensboro airport baggage claim monitor) and PTI Visitor Center (brochures at Greensboro airport). The Burke Manor also has brochures and informational printed material with various visitor centers through North Carolina, including Alamance and Guilford County Chamber of Commerce and the Alamance Convention and Visitor's Bureau. They also advertise with WeddingWire, TripAdvisor and Antique Trail. In the past, they have done sporadic advertising with UNC-TV, *Our State* Magazine and WFMY.

Additional reach includes the utilization of Open Table as a dining reservation system, which gives them the capabilities of sending out mass email newsletters via Fishbowl to their client base at a minimum of one to two times a month. Saint Jacques' chef was also recently featured on the Good Morning Show cooking segment with WFMY.

Accreditations held by Burke Manor include being listed in the AAA Guide Book, as well as being the only restaurant in the Triad to receive a Four Diamond AAA rating. They are also now a Select Registry Property and Select Registry promotes The Burke Manor on their website and book.

Top Recommendations:

- Make Saint Jacques a separate entity on social media. Something as special as a 4-star French cuisine restaurant in downtown Gibsonville should be leveraged greater online
- Consider targeting Elon University students, alumni and parents in social media to increase a nearby or visiting, ready-to-spend customer base
- Consider visual updates to the website to optimize customer experience

2. Gibsonville Antiques & Collectibles

Gibsonville Antiques does not have an Instagram account. They currently have 22 geotagged photos utilizing their location. Gibsonville Antiques Facebook page has 1,976 likes with a 4.6 out of 5 rating based on 80 reviews written by customers. They post very regularly, nearly daily, with a decent level of engagement. They primarily post photos of new merchandise which should be cross-platformed with Instagram to reach the mediums' different audiences. Gibsonville Antiques' website is dated with unclear navigability. The website could use photo, graphic, and written copy updates to reflect the exciting merchandise and events available to customers.

During the interview, Myra talked about her customer base and Gibsonville Antiques' passion to reach them. She mentioned the distance that her customers often travel just to visit them. We discussed her internal events that include book signings, birthday celebrations and fifth Saturday sales to bring in customers and elevate the experience at the shop. Gibsonville Antiques advertises in *Sunday Drive*, *Antique Trail* and *Peddler*, all three of which are popular antique magazines. They also advertise in *O'Henry* and *Seasons* and have a commercial running before *Antique Roadshow* on PBS and before *NC Weekend*. They usually advertise with *WFMY*, but are taking a break for the months of January and February 2019. Gibsonville Antiques also has eight DOT signs on highway 40/85 that direct people from the interstate off the appropriate exit.

Our secret shopping experience was incredibly pleasant and we enjoyed walking around and seeing how many people know and love Gibsonville Antiques. Our team was offered coffee and cake and were shown the different areas of the large store. Gibsonville Antiques does a great job at promoting and supporting local antique shops tourism. They have lots of antique magazines, brochures and fliers in the shops. However, this could be a great tool to increase the other businesses around Gibsonville, showcasing restaurants, other shops and kid-friendly activities and community events.

Myra's business is celebrating their eighth year in business this year. They run radio ads from October to December to generate retail traffic. They are trying to figure out economical avenues to purchase an ad in *Our State* magazine in collaboration with other local merchants. They have been advertising with PBS for over a year. Social media is done in-house by Myra's daughter. They do not utilize Yelp or Google Business. Their next priority for marketing is redoing their website. All sales are marketed through word of mouth, in-house fliers and Facebook posts.

Top Recommendations:

- Utilize Instagram, Yelp and Google Business/AdWords to increase visibility to current and potential customer base
- Update website visuals and graphic elements to optimize the user experience
- Utilize blade signs and other wayfinding to push foot traffic towards the storefront

3. Wade's Jewelers

Wade's Jewelers' Instagram account was established on May 12, 2014. They have 843 followers, 26 tagged photos, and 28 geotagged photos at their location. They post semi-regularly with a low level of engagement (likes, comments and shares). Their Facebook has 3,259 likes with a 4.7 out of 5 rating based on 94 customer reviews. They post more regularly on this medium, nearly daily, with a lot of photos that receive decent engagement from users. Wade's Jewelers' website is great and highly dynamic with easy to navigate links and great visuals.

When our team visited Wade's Jewelers, we were greeted several times around the shop and were asked if we needed anything. The store was fairly busy when we visited, but several staff members still took time to talk to us. Our team spoke with William at Wade's Jewelers during the interview segment. They utilize paid advertising in the form of radio on 99.5 and Dick Broadcasting (107.5 and 93.1). They also run ads with Fox 8 and Spectrum. The Spectrum ads run in the Alamance County region but expand to the Triad during the holiday season. WFMY runs both television and radio ads. Wades runs their Facebook and Instagram in-house and utilizes Times News on occasion, both digitally and through print. Wade's Jewelers has run ads in *News and Record* and their magazine, *1808*. They have also run ads in *O'Henry* and their sister magazine, *Seasons*. *The Knot*, a popular wedding magazine, also runs print and digital advertisements for Wade's. Even with all of this marketing and advertising, word of mouth has yielded the greatest new customers and first-time buyers.

In a strong, thriving downtown, the businesses often share foot traffic and have an overlapping customer base. Our team asked Wade's if they were able to share foot traffic with any local businesses. They mentioned that they receive walking traffic from customers who have also visited Burke Manor Inn and Posh Paws. There are other businesses that have a potential to share foot traffic with Wade's that is not presently being leveraged. Once Upon a Chocolate and County Line are two great examples of businesses who could overlap downtown foot traffic and a customer base.

Sponsorship is another way that Wade's gets the word out to the community. They have sponsored Alamance Regional Charitable Foundation, Western High School and Elon Athletics. They also participate in Talk of the Town coupons. All of these sponsorships yield to name placement in key communities around Alamance County.

Unrelated to downtown Gibsonville, but very notable as far as the health of the business goes, Wade's has opened a sister store this past May in Southport, North Carolina. Gibsonville is the downtown where the flagship store was built. They have three billboards in Southport and are in the *Southport Pilot* newspaper advertising to bring people to the new store.

Top Recommendations:

- Consistent/scheduled content on Instagram and Facebook to grow social media presence/digital marketing efforts
- Utilize Google AdWords and search engine optimization tools to gain visibility and searchability from potential customers
- Host events with local community members and groups to increase foot traffic and get people in the space

4. The Diamond Room

The Diamond Room Instagram account was recently established on November 22, 2018. They have 33 followers, no tagged photos and 31 geotagged photos. With time and consistency, this medium could grow to be a successful marketing tool for the venue. The Diamond Room Facebook page has 237 likes, with no option for users to review the business and share their experience. Their posts generally receive a low level of engagement, with a few likes and typically no comments or shares. Their posts on Facebook also lack consistency in timing, often with several weeks between posts.

The Diamond Room's website is mediocre and could use significant strengthening in visuals and copy. Wade's Jewelers website contains a venue page for The Diamond Room that is much stronger than the venue's separate website. The Diamond Room has the potential to reach a much larger audience, they need to establish a strong, separate website apart from Wade's Jewelers. This larger audience could consist of those interested in booking the venue space for business trainings, educational events, community gatherings, graduation parties and high school reunions.

Most of the leads and bookings for the Diamond Room are gained through their ads in *The Knot*, *Wedding Wire* and other wedding/event avenues such as Eventective. The Diamond Room has been advertising with *The Knot*, both digitally and through print, for years and have seen positive results. Occasionally they will run in other wedding publications such as *Triad Weddings* and *Alamance Forever*, as well as participating in bridal shows. The Diamond Room has a separate marketing budget from Wade's, but benefits from a dual marketing strategy. The Diamond Room primarily gains customers through word of mouth, repeating visitors or from Google searches. There is great potential to reach a larger audience by branching out from these wedding-focused avenues of advertising.

They are currently undergoing updates to their materials, packages, and upgrading their wedding portals, website, and images on social media. They recently began utilizing Instagram and Facebook and started posting each week, as of last month. Their future plans are to eventually add Pinterest and LinkedIn. Debbie is very interested in furthering their reach through marketing and listens to webinars on *The Knot*, *Wedding Wire* and others to stay abreast of industry-specific trends.

Top Recommendations:

- Consistent/scheduled content on Facebook and Instagram to continue the growth of social media presence
- Update website with strong visuals and copy to maximize visibility and easily share information with interested customers
- Establishing separate marketing strategies and audiences than Wade's to distinguish themselves and their offerings

5. Hardwood Store

The Hardwood Store of North Carolina's Instagram account was established on April 1, 2014. They have 578 followers, 73 tagged photos, and 26 photos that use their location in geotagging. The account does a good job of integrating user-generated content, material/product photos, and graphics specific to store happenings.

The Hardwood Store of North Carolina's Facebook page has 1,290 likes with a 4.9 out of 5 customer rating based on 42 reviews. They post consistently with good engagement. Their website has great, clear navigability, but could use stronger visuals, graphic elements, and copy updates.

When we visited The Hardwood Store midday, there was a high level of foot traffic. We were greeted and made our way around the store. The staff was very busy with other customers and we left after looking around. The Hardwood Store only runs one ad through a commercial on PBS that airs weekly before a woodworking show. They said that they stay busy and do not have the capacity to run any additional advertising. The Hardwood Store is at a great location for customers as far as parking, but you really have to know where you are going. Some wayfinding downtown could assist in more walk-in traffic.

Top Recommendations:

- Update website visuals and graphics to optimize the user experience
- Signage updates for shoppers to easily identify the storefront
- Wayfinding from downtown
- Continue to grow and establish social media presence through consistent, high-quality posts

6. Maple View's County Line Creamery Company

Being a newer business to downtown Gibsonville, County Line Creamery Company's Instagram account was established semi-recently on May 14, 2018. They have 171 followers with 4 tagged photos and 64 geotagged photos to their location. County Line has untapped potential utilizing user-generated content from visitors and patrons of the shop.

The County Line Creamery Company's Facebook has 4,697 likes and a 4.7 out of 5 rating based on 298 customer ratings. Their Facebook posts are consistent with a good level of engagement. They do not have their own, free-standing website, but a sub-page on Maple View's main website under a "Where To Buy" section. There is little information on the shop and poor use of visuals. The creamery may consider creating their own website to clearly share hours, events and other information for customers to easily find and patronize the shop.

The staff is friendly and helpful. We were greeted and asked how we could be helped. The manager is very nice and told us about the family and their other businesses around town. They have an established brand that was easy to connect to.

We spoke with Stephanie, the onsite manager. She said that they are giving the location a year to stand and create baselines. During this time they are advertising through Facebook and Instagram. They will be in the Attractions coupon book and Talk of the Town beginning next year.

Top Recommendations:

- Utilize user-generated content on Instagram and Facebook to connect with customers
- Create a separate website to share information and increase foot traffic to the storefront
- Continue to establish social media presence by posting consistent, high-quality content on Instagram

7. Sherry's on Main

Sherry's on Main appears to have an unutilized Instagram account. This exists as an untapped marketing tool for the company to share photos of new merchandise, sales and other storefront information that could be useful for customers. Sherry's on Main's Facebook page has 495 likes with a 4.9 out of 5 rating based on 24 customer reviews. They post very inconsistently, once every few months, with decent engagement. Overall, there is a missed opportunity by Sherry's on Main not utilizing social media to its fullest potential. Their website is easy to navigate and seems semi-up-to-date, but could use stronger visuals and graphic elements.

We visited Sherry's on Main and were invited to come in and look around. The staff let us know that the upstairs was also available and filled with furniture. We chatted with the staff and looked around. When we left, we were invited to come back and check in often as their inventory changes frequently.

Through talking to Sherry, we learned that most of their sales and traffic comes from their website. They ship furniture all over the U.S and have had requests to ship things as far as Canada. They periodically advertise in the Times News and have a commercial that runs every Saturday on WFMY. They are also listed in a consignment store antique map that helps drive traffic to the storefront.

Top Recommendations:

- Utilize Instagram to share new merchandise, sales and other shop happenings
- Update photos and graphic elements on the website to optimize the user experience
- Utilize Google AdWords and search engine optimization tools to gain visibility and searchability from potential customers

8. Bear Bottom Consignment

Bear Bottom Consignment does not have an associated Instagram account with their business. Their Facebook presence is strong, with 4,127 page likes and a 4.8 out of 5 rating based on 150 customer reviews. Their Facebook posts are consistent, nearly daily, with high engagement through likes, comments and shares. This content could easily be cross-platformed with an affiliated Instagram account to maximize visibility to different audiences. Bear Bottom Consignments does not have a website, making Facebook their only form of communication with customers.

When we visited Bear Bottom Consignment, we were offered hot chocolate and cookies and looked around. We were greeted and asked if we were looking for anything. We learned that the shop used to be located in Hillsborough, and then Mebane, before moving to Gibsonville. They use Facebook for online marketing, but also to communicate with their customers and consigners individually. They also are on the Consignment Alamance/Guilford map and listserv, but they are still listed under their Mebane address.

Through talking with Paul, he mentioned that most of his business and consigners comes from the surrounding area and not necessarily Gibsonville, although that market is growing. Paul commented on how most businesses do not show an interest in cross-marketing in downtown Gibsonville and how much of the merchants have not visited each other's stores. Their signage makes them easily identifiable, but they are disconnected from the rest of the downtown community with their location in a strip mall.

Top Recommendations:

- Utilize Instagram to share new merchandise, sales and other shop happenings
- Create a website to maximize visibility and easily share information with interested customers
- Could use a way to visually and physically make them feel more part of downtown (e.g. planters, blade signs, signage near parking, etc.).

9. Ines Bakery

We could not find an Instagram account for Ines Bakery. Their Facebook presence is strong, with 1,075 page likes and a 5 out of 5 rating based on 7 customer reviews. Their Facebook posts are consistent, nearly daily, with high engagement through likes, comments and shares. This content could easily be cross-platformed with an affiliated Instagram account to maximize visibility to different audiences. Ines Bakery does not have a website, making Facebook their only form of communication with customers.

Ines and her shop are great. Our team walked in mid-afternoon and were immediately greeted by a voice from the back. She quickly came to the front counter and asked what she could help us with. She assisted in helping us pick out pastries which we purchased and then left. I had asked if she had coffee and she said that they did not, but she thought that the gas station had coffee.

During our interview, Ines stated that they currently utilized Facebook and Instagram for advertisement, with no paid media. We were unable to find their associated Instagram account.

Top Recommendations:

- Utilize Instagram, Yelp and Google Business/AdWords to increase visibility to current and potential customer base
- Create a website to share information and increase foot traffic to storefront
- Consider selling products in nearby shops such as Steve's Garden Market to increase visibility throughout the area.

10. Once Upon a Chocolate

Once Upon a Chocolate does not have an associated Instagram account with their business. Their Facebook page has 875 page likes with no option for customers to leave a review. Their Facebook posts are semi-consistent, with decent engagement through likes, comments and shares. This content could easily be cross-platformed with an affiliated Instagram account to maximize visibility to different audiences. The Once Upon a Chocolate website has decent navigability, but shows their need for an established, consistent brand. The website also highlights how the majority of sales is done through shipping out product as opposed to in-person.

Our secret shopping experience was very enjoyable in Once Upon a Chocolate. She has a clear sign so we immediately knew where the business was located. They had a neon open sign that was lit and in keeping with their hours posted on the door. Our team walked into the door and were greeted. Debbie asked if we were looking for anything in particular. We said we were just looking and she let us explore the shop.

Eighty percent of Debbie's business is shipped out to other parts of the United States. She conducts a lot of her business from completing large orders for corporate events, weddings, etc. Therefore, her website is the best marketing tool she has. She does very little marketing via social media. She said that Facebook never paid off for her. She does not have an Instagram account. As of now, she has not utilized Google AdWords. She states that she stays busy and has very little competition in the market. Because of the high percentage of business from other areas, it is hard to make Gibsonville and the surrounding area a priority as far as curating customers and prioritizing marketing to increase foot traffic.

She noted that it is hard to continue to pour into the community when all of the events and happenings take people back to Main Street. There was a snowflake on her road, but during Lighting of the Greens, all of the exciting things were blocks away from her storefront.

Top Recommendations:

- Utilize Instagram and Google AdWords to increase visibility to current and potential customer base
- Get products out in the community at Harrisons or similar businesses for brand attachment and exposure to drive traffic to the nearby storefront
- Establish a brand with consistent logos, colors and fonts for use on all printed and digital mediums

Town Report Out

11. Town of Gibsonville

There is a lack of social media engagement from the town as far as a website and social media platforms. The Town of Gibsonville has no associated Instagram account. Our team secured the @townofgibsonville as a placeholder to use for future marketing endeavors. The Town of Gibsonville Facebook has 500 page likes. They post very consistently with low engagement (likes, comments and shares). We have found The Town of Gibsonville compares well with its peer city website. The gallery of photos on the homepage could be redesigned or updated for a visual refresh.

We secret shopped the Town itself. It is clearly marked when entering into Gibsonville due to signage. Town Hall is easy to find and the city staff is very kind and attentive. There are well-marked trash cans and the sidewalks are in good repair. Most of the high-traffic areas in downtown have sidewalks on at least one side of the street. The things we found that could be increased are the number of benches, the potential for outdoor seating, low maintenance/no water planters and public art to engage people as they walk around downtown.

We spoke to Ben about how the town advertises itself as a place to call home or to visitors. He could not speak to the Alamance or Guilford County Tourism initiatives that included Gibsonville. When speaking to the ways that Gibsonville communicated with its residents or with the greater community, he noted that they use the CYT automated text/call system to communicate to residents about information and about events and town happenings. We asked about using networks such as the Council of Mayors in North Carolina to get information out to the greater community, but these avenues are not presently being pursued.

Our overall findings for the actual Town of Gibsonville audit is that the city staff and leadership does a great job managing a well-functioning town. Overall, Gibsonville is a clean, quaint,

friendly place. What we believe to be the missing piece is the messaging of promotion and growth from the town itself. Through Facebook, the Town of Gibsonville shares posts from the library, the Garden Railroad, Public Works, the police department and Parks and Rec. They also share a few stormwater tips and when the city will be closed. This platform could be used to excite the local community about growth, coming businesses, shopping downtown during retail seasons, the holidays, etc.

Top Recommendations:

- Town brand/promotion of Gibsonville as a place to learn, grow and live
- Implementation of town-specific Instagram
- Prioritize local business and happenings on town Facebook

12. Gibsonville Library

The Gibsonville Library Instagram account was established recently on September 27, 2018. They have 176 followers with no tagged photos and 20 geotagged photos. Their Facebook has 501 likes and a 4.6 out of 5 rating based on 12 reviews from users. Similarly to the Town of Gibsonville, they post consistently with a low level of engagement (likes, comments and shares). Their website is average with easy to use navigability but poor visuals that could use significant updating.

The Gibsonville Library has great parking and is located a short walk from downtown. The staff is super friendly. We were greeted when we stopped in. Jess at the library is very interested in reaching the community and letting them know about programs and resources available. She has inquired about running ads at Alamance Crossing Carousel before movies show and is putting effort into thinking up creative ways to market to the community. They currently have monthly emails going out to their listserv and have been putting event information in monthly water bill mailings to communicate directly with the residents. Jess is looking to start doing 'Welcome to the Neighborhood' postcards to notify new residents that the library is active in the community, but this initiative has not begun yet.

Top Recommendations:

- The Library sign is small and hard to locate. Our team had been in and around Gibsonville several times and had to use the address to find the library when we went to secret shop.
- Prioritize posting high-quality content on Instagram and Facebook to promote events and offerings

13. Gibsonville Parks & Rec

Gibsonville Parks and Rec Instagram was established on November 13, 2016. They have 294 followers, 4 tagged photos and no photos geotagging their location. Their Facebook page has

2,150 likes with a 4.7 out of 5 rating based on 27 reviews. They post consistently, primarily informative posts with low engagement. Their website is a sub-page on the Town of Gibsonville website and does not have much information regarding the details of the department.

When we spoke to Heidi at Parks and Rec, she noted that they primarily inform community members of events and happenings through newspaper advertisements, an email database with over 1,000 local contacts, phone tree and water bill mailers. They walk fliers to the local businesses to inform customers of upcoming events.

Top Recommendations:

- Further utilize Facebook and Instagram to share department events and other related city happenings
- Increase report with local businesses to share programming
- Maps/timelines posted for each event through social media, the website and printed material around town

14. Gibsonville Garden Railroad

The Gibsonville Garden Railroad has no associated Instagram account. Their Facebook page has 637 likes and a 4.7 out of 5 rating based on 19 reviews. They post consistently with high engagement through likes, comments and shares. This visual-heavy content could be cross-platformed and utilized on Instagram to reach a different market audience. The Gibsonville Garden Railroad has a subpage on the town website.

We experienced the Gibsonville Garden Railroad during the Lighting of the Greens event. Onlookers seemed a bit confused and the railroad could have used further facilitation, explanation and/or signage to give attendees a sense of what was going on in the activated space. We learned through the interview process that literature is handed out during open hours and is posted on the bulletin board by the public restrooms, but in the midst of the event, this was not realized.

The railroad does not utilize any paid advertising. They use their membership to spread information by word of mouth. They feed stories through their board member, Ivan Cutler. Ivan is able to advertise the railroad in a few different local magazines. The railroad has great visibility located in the center of town, however, it may benefit from additional and larger signage that further explains the installation. The interview revealed that the organization has media assets (in the form of drone videos, etc.), but these could be further leveraged to draw more attention and foot-traffic to the attraction.

Top Recommendations:

- Utilize Instagram to increase visibility to current and potential customer base and showcase existing media assets

- Create a separate website to be viewed as a unique entity, apart from the Town of Gibsonville
- Relevant printed material in a weatherproof box near the installation for people to do self-tours when the train is not running

15. Gibsonville Merchants Association

The Gibsonville Merchants Association has an Instagram account but no content posted. Their Facebook page has 1,153 likes and a 5 out of 5 rating based on 4 reviews. They post consistently with high engagement through likes, comments and shares. This visual-heavy content could be cross-platformed and utilized on Instagram to reach a different market audience. The Gibsonville Merchants Association has a subpage on the town website.

The Gibsonville Merchants Association is trying to increase marketing efforts on Facebook. They also have a yearly brochure to be handed out by the restaurant and GMA members. They installed a Gibsonville sign on the corner of Springwood and I-70 and hang additional signage promoting seasonal events.

The Gibsonville Merchants Association is responsible for creating a calendar for the year that as many events as possible are included (ie: Market Saturdays, themed market days, parades, car shows, Fall Festival, Lighting of the greens, etc). They send emails to all businesses in town sharing educational and networking opportunities. The past couple of years they have hosted a business social which we have had prominent speakers (Alamance Chamber President and Guildford Chamber President) which has been well received and attended by various business and town representatives.

Top Recommendations:

- Utilize Instagram to increase visibility to community members
- Shift meetings to different locations to form a greater understanding of the business community within the association

Events and Happenings vs. Awareness

Our team found that there was a good turn out for the events happening in downtown Gibsonville, but that they were not necessarily marketed well either online or in print. On the Facebook event page for the Lighting of the Greens, there was a comment from a new Gibsonville resident that stated how they wished more time-sensitive information had been shared on the Facebook event page, as they had missed the tree lighting by 15 minutes. The event appeared to be shared once each from the Town of Gibsonville and Gibsonville Parks and Rec Facebook pages. The event page was not populated with information prior to or during the

event to get attendees excited about offerings.

The Christmas parade was well attended, and many attendees expressed that they and their families had been coming for many years. According to our findings, 372 said they attended the event via Facebook, with 2,000 interested in coming to the Christmas parade. The event appeared to have not been shared by the Town of Gibsonville, Gibsonville Parks and Rec or other city-affiliated Facebook pages. The event page was not populated with information prior to or during the event to get attendees excited about offerings.

The events, by and large, are great for community engagement, but bad for the downtown businesses. We observed and heard reiterated that the events took up parking, blocked the streets and prevented customers from coming into their shops. Through talking with the business community, our team found that they are a begrudging host of the parade and other events because the streets are closed and the events only affect their business negatively. When talking to merchants about the Christmas Parade, several people brought up the time issue that the street closures cause. Merchants mentioned that having the parade on a Saturday morning would allow some of their Christmas clientele to still patronize their shops in the afternoon. This is worth noting only in that the business community is not going to help get the word out and promote city events because they feel they work adversely for sales and business.

We see this as a point to pivot the event management from the Merchants Association to the Parks and Rec department. This is a pivotal and needed transition for the health of the events. If the businesses are not in full support of the event, yet are the ones putting on the event, the marketing and messaging around the event will never be as strong as it could be.

The second thing that can be done to avoid tension between the business community and events downtown Gibsonville is to develop or adopt a business-friendly event that encourages people to go into stores, purchase items and get to know their local business owners. These could take the form of First Saturday, or something of the sort, where the business community comes together to stay open an extra hour or spearheads a shopping-centric event. First Saturdays are the perfect opportunity because during the months of April through December, downtown already has the railroad and the market in place to help attract people.

Overall Marketing Analysis

Everyone we spoke to said that they facilitate their marketing strategies in house. The only exception to this is that Burke Manor just hired a new firm to help post consistently on social media. The fact that the local businesses are utilizing 'bootstrap marketing' works to the community's benefit because they best know how to communicate the feel and goals of Gibsonville. However, we have found through our work with other municipalities that certain workshops and webinars can be helpful in strengthening the businesses' efforts to best leverage

free or self-curated advertising. Examples of these include workshops include a Facebook marketing class, an Instagram marketing class, overall social media marketing class, website creation and updating and target market and audience identification.

The Promotions Report claims that Gibsonville is a “friendly small town,” “attractive-charming,” and a “shop-eat” town. We have found through walking around, patronizing businesses and attending community events that this is accurate. However, through talking to your identified business pillars and analyzing the marketing material being released, we have found that the Gibsonville business community is largely too concerned with reaching their specific customer base to promote these downtown characteristics. There is a need for a unifying messaging campaign to bring together the business community under one brand so that all potential customers are exposed to the entirety of downtown offerings.

With so many different businesses reaching a broad customer base, a unifying messaging campaign would not distract from each business reaching their customer, but only strengthen them through cross-promotion. This would also take the pressure off of each individual business to elevate themselves through marketing individually because the overall community would be a gap filler for the untapped markets through the town brand. There needs to be some continuity in the town which can be established through the Town of Gibsonville or the GMA, but there is a need for a leader to establish an umbrella brand. This cannot be done from one or a grouping of businesses. If it is done from a business or group of businesses, then the marketing will be self-serving to one industry or group. Downtown businesses can be scrutinized and then elevated significantly, but without supporting the downtown experience and cultivating a connected atmosphere, Gibsonville will ultimately sustain with no increased momentum.

There are also new and old businesses in the community that are forming a shadow economy in Gibsonville. These businesses could be bringing in a new demographic of customer (Elon University students, young professions, etc.) that would fill the gaps and help support current and incoming businesses. Kevin Ray Tattoos, Frank’s Lounge and The Buzz are all presently appealing to this shadow economy.

We visited Frank’s and found it to be the local neighborhood bar where everyone knows your name, greets you when you enter and hugs you when you leave. This pub is the epitome of what Gibsonville claims the community to be: friendly, quaint and charming. The Buzz is the new barber shop in town and has branding that appeals to young professionals. Kevin Ray Tattoos attracts and hosts an out-of-town, aesthetic-conscience crowd. He is the gateway for a large number of tourists and potential patrons visiting Gibsonville.

With all of this activity going on, it is pivotal that a town brand/identity be established to channel momentum to not only the individual businesses or subgroups, but to the overall downtown. Businesses are doing well but could be doing better with some support. It is not enough that there is enough parking and cheap real estate. There are additional unifying initiatives that the

city can implement that would help catalyze additional foot traffic. These initiatives can help build up your business community and increase town pride. Our primary suggestions include:

- **Wayfinding:** A local merchant recommended that this can be as simple as putting arrows on the red train car in the center of town. Each business could purchase their own branded arrow in order to direct people “This way to chocolate, this way to ice cream,” etc. If businesses are not located on Main Street, it is very easy to miss them. Wayfinding would help to identify key businesses without showy storefronts. Additionally, the library, the hardwood store and others do not have great signage. Wayfinding would allow people to at least be on the lookout instead of bypassing these important businesses.
- **Place-based marketing:** We have seen the incredible value of a well-curated, ongoing social media presence on behalf of a town. The account can utilize user-generated content to tell the full story of the Gibsonville community, while also keeping people informed of new businesses and town happenings. The account has the potential to establish place attachment for current residents, while also growing a momentum that ultimately brings businesses to sign leases in the downtown district and increase foot traffic.
- **Public art:** Public art is a useful tool to engage people between walking business to business. Gibsonville has no trouble attracting people from all over the United States. What they do have trouble with is customers leaving after visiting a single business. Public Art could help with inviting people to explore your downtown and increase lingering.
- **Community-informed business recruitment:** There are currently gaps in the market offerings and retail space to host other businesses in downtown Gibsonville. Bringing in businesses that the current business and residential community would support could serve as a downtown building block.
- **Small business workshops:** The small business community is doing well in attracting their target market. The biggest gap that we saw in our analysis was on the utilization of social media platforms. Hosting workshops or online webinars for the small business community to learn more about free tools such as Hootsuite, Instagram and Facebook and how to strategically use these resources could leverage the good work that is already being done by the merchants.

Our team was surprised by the amount of paid advertisement we found through the interview portion of the assessment. We did not expect to hear about all of the out-of-town visitors, out-of-town marketing and visible signs that people are traveling from states away to visit Gibsonville. One glance at Gibsonville Antique’s Facebook page or Kevin Ray Tattoo’s

Instagram is quickly indicative of how far customers will travel to visit the unique businesses in Gibsonville.

The number one thing that we have found during this study is that at first look, downtown Gibsonville looks unactivated and sleepy. There are cars and people downtown for lunch and special events, but not a lot of foot traffic can be seen in other parts of the day. It is a beautiful downtown that is full of possibilities, so the lack of action is perceived as a contrast.

After the study and during our period of reflection, we have come to the conclusion that the businesses make things work for them. They sell online or attract people through other means if the foot traffic is not present. Downtown is still suffering because businesses attract specific customers and once they are done shopping at that business, the customer leaves town.

Gibsonville is relying on the businesses to bring people downtown when Gibsonville as a town needs to make the first effort in marketing. The businesses are doing alright but could be doing remarkably better if the town took initiating action steps. There is a clear need for a unifier. The businesses currently in Gibsonville market or they do not, but they are looking out for themselves, not the overall downtown landscape or experience. In our opinion, it is the town's responsibility to establish a brand so that individual marketing efforts can be maximized.

Gibsonville is a unique downtown that is located with 1.4 million people in the surrounding 25 miles.² This community is at the cross section of two counties (Alamance and Guilford) that have a growth rate of over 12 percent individually in the last 10 years. This lends itself to a large market potential. This growing population only needs to know what exists within your community. The business offerings are artisanal, specialty and quaint. There is so much potential to be unlocked in Gibsonville with the proper leveraging of marketing and messaging.

² Population statistic taken from StatsAmerica.org, supported from the U.S. Economic Development Administration