

Appeals to young, hungry families created

Students in the University of Tennessee's College of Business Administration's integrated marketing communications course, a senior-level marketing elective, last fall were challenged by Shoney's to create a plan to increase dinner sales among young families.

Company: Headquartered in Nashville, 268 Shoney's restaurants are located in 18 Southeastern states. Shoney's of Knoxville is a locally owned and operated franchise with 21 locations in 10 East Tennessee counties. Within the Shoney's system, the Knoxville locations are the best operating with the highest profits.

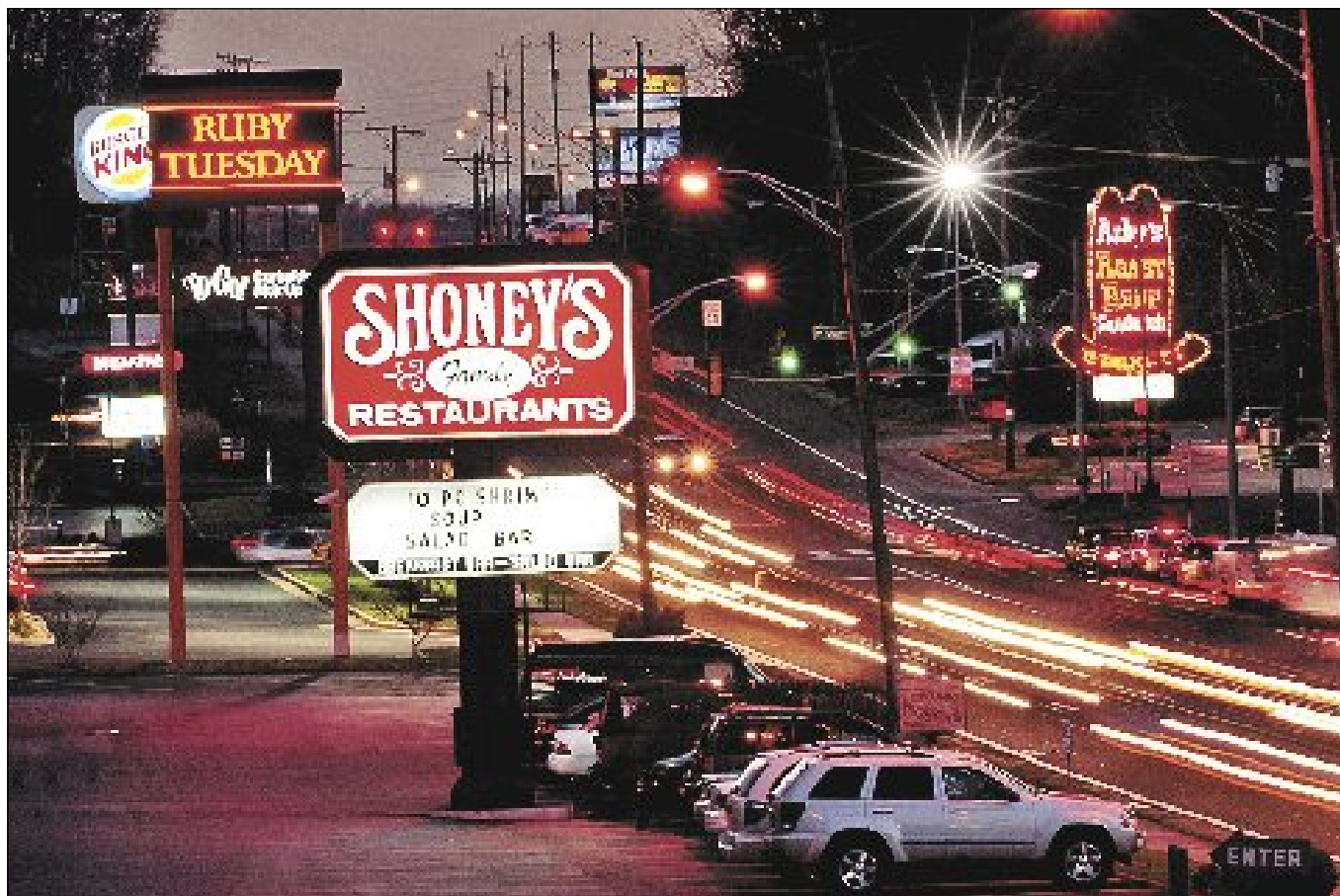
Challenge: As a marketing vanguard for the rest of the Shoney's system, the Knoxville locations are targeting younger families in addition to its traditional "over 50" demographic. Shoney's management challenged the marketing students to help them in this effort, specifically for dinner.

Students: Jennifer Blosser, Andrea Maynard, Kristin Osucha and Taylor Reynolds under the leadership of course lecturer and marketing Ph.D. candidate, Scott Rader.

Approach: Students initially conducted research to better understand the consumer experience inside the restaurants. Using vouchers provided by the company, students visited various Shoney's locations in and around Knoxville and enjoyed a meal while recording observations and interviewing customers and employees. They used this information as the foundation for their strategic analysis and recommendations. The team also analyzed Shoney's competitive position, relevant economic and social trends, and existing marketing and branding efforts to establish the framework for their plan.

Recommendations: The students discovered an opportunity to promote Shoney's home-style, traditional cooking among families that are strapped for time but seek quality meals as an alternative to fast food. Traditional customers often frequent Shoney's for the "sit down and be social" experience; the younger demographic seeks convenience coupled with quality.

The team employed a combination of tactics to achieve a 5 percent increase in dinner menu sales for the target market over the previous year.



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Students recommended that Shoney's of Knoxville institute curbside to-go service like many of its competitors as one way to draw young families seeking an alternative to fast food.

SHONEY'S OF KNOXVILLE

Corporate office: 9720 Parkside Drive

Phone: 865-690-6331

Web site: <http://www.greaterknoxville-shoneys.com/>

Its primary recommendation was to offer the family-friendly convenience of curbside to-go service. The team provided visual mock-ups of consistent messaging and imagery across consumer touch points such as to-go bags, dedicated parking spots and pick-up stations. Key messaging in support of strategic recommendations included "Less Time, Well Spent" and "Leave it to Shoney's."

"Shoney's is a restaurant unlike other casual dining concepts in that it offers appealing, true 'Southern-style' home cooking," Blosser said. "There is signifi-

cant opportunity in making this offering available for quick pick-up by busy families on the go."

Noting the influence of children on their parents' purchases, the team also suggested a rejuvenation of the mascots Shoney Bear and Friends, including the introduction of a female Sandy Bear. The team proposed that the characters make appearances during Shoney's-sponsored community events as part of a family-focused public relations campaign.

"Shoney's already is heavily involved in family-oriented events such as the KidCare PhotoID safety program. We're advising them to use Shoney and Sandy Bear characters that also will be shown in the curbside collateral, take-out bags and around the take-out area inside the restaurants," Reynolds said.

Results: "We were very pleased with the creative, forward-thinking strategies

that the student groups presented," said Annie LaLonde, marketing and advertising director for Shoney's of Knoxville. "We were especially intrigued with the suggestion for introducing carry-out and are currently investigating its feasibility."

Hannibal Myers, executive vice president and chief marketing officer of Shoney's North America, stated, "We consider this partnership with the University of Tennessee a valuable learning opportunity for all parties. We are set to gain fresh insights and innovation from the bright, inquisitive marketing students participating in the program."

Case Study is provided by the University of Tennessee College of Business Administration. Companies and organizations interested in participating as clients should contact Cindy Raines at craines1@utk.edu.