

Art gallery gets plan to attract locals, visitors

Integrated Marketing Communications at the University of Tennessee's College of Business Administration is a senior-level marketing elective for undergraduate students. Students are asked to work in teams to develop a real-world integrated marketing communications plan for an area organization. Last spring, students worked with Twisted Vessel Art Gallery to enhance its perception among Knoxville-area residents and to increase local patronage.

Company: The Twisted Vessel Gallery, located in the historic Old Mill District, is owned and operated by ceramic artist Steve Gamza. The gallery showcases Gamza's work as well as works in clay, glass, wood, paintings and jewelry created by nationally recognized artists.

While the gallery has always enjoyed a strong national clientele who have either visited the gallery or are aware of its featured artists, Gamza sought to increase awareness among local residents and visitors to the Pigeon Forge/Knoxville area.

Students were presented with the task of developing a marketing communications plan that addressed potential local demand in an effort to increase awareness of the gallery.

Students: David Garrett, Virginia Hoover, Erin Maloney, John-Michael Riggs, Lauren Wise under the leadership of course lecturer, Scott Rader.

Approach: During the course of the semester, students analyzed the gallery's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and conducted in-depth, ethnographic-style interviews to understand the target market's values and needs. The team analyzed existing marketing and branding efforts, assessing what Twisted Vessel Gallery was saying and how it was presenting itself to the target market. The team analyzed how existing loyal customers felt about the gallery and its offerings, and how characteristics of those customers could be used to assess the local market for unique art.

Recommendations: Through extensive research, the student team discovered that the ideal target market for the gallery included wealthier retirees typically living in upscale developments such as Rarity Bay, Tellico Village and Lakefront Estates. With higher discretionary incomes, the desire to decorate retirement homes and ample free time to experience



Visitors browse the art on display at Twisted Vessel Gallery in Pigeon Forge, which worked with University of Tennessee students to create a marketing plan.

BUSINESS JOURNAL

TWISTED VESSEL GALLERY

Address: 3335 Old Mill St., Pigeon Forge, Tenn. 37863

Phone: 865-453-4945

E-mail: twistedvesselgallery@mac.com

Web: www.twistedvesselgallery.com

the "finer things in life" such as art, this market segment was determined to be most lucrative for the gallery.

The team incorporated four separate tactics with the objective of increasing target audience awareness by 10 percent in the fiscal year. The four tactics were an integrated effort including event marketing, a Web site redesign, art displays at community clubhouses and an exclusive "membership" affinity program. The first three tactics were designed to attract new customers, while the affinity program was intended to retain them.

The event marketing recommendation involved a schedule of periodic "open house" events at the gallery, with a focus on maintaining an upscale image throughout invitations, signage, refreshments and displays.

A proposed Web site redesign took

advantage of design characteristics that appeal to the target audience, including modeling the site after existing sites intended for the same demographic.

Extending a tactic that Twisted Vessel Gallery employs at the Pigeon Forge Welcome Center, the team advised the gallery to place art displays at community clubhouses in the targeted retirement communities.

The team also developed a unique "Harbor League Society" membership program comprised of fellow art lovers. Society members would receive invitations for exclusive open house events, as well as notifications of work from new artists and special promotional offers.

The team emphasized a consistent upscale look and feel to marketing materials and communications, along with consistent messaging created to appeal to the values and desires of the target market.

"With this kind of product and target market, the customer wants to be up close and personal to truly appreciate it," explained team member Virginia Hoover.

Team member John-Michael Riggs added, "We want people to experience the art. That's our primary message in all marketing communications. That is also

why we emphasize the event marketing efforts and displays at the clubhouses. Even the Web site encourages them to come in, versus buy online."

Results: At the recommendation of students in the course, Twisted Vessel Gallery immediately acquired a highly recognizable domain name for its Web site. The gallery also leveraged the research and recommendations of the student teams by expanding and improving its Web site to better accommodate the target market; registering their gallery in highly targeted, art-oriented online databases; and enhancing their logo and touch points with potential customers.

Gallery Director Stephanie Brichetto noted: "The student teams provided us with many great suggestions, particularly with regard to our Internet-based efforts. In spite of a tight economy, we are able to implement a lot of their ideas."

Specifically, the gallery is considering targeting retired communities, a potentially lucrative segment of art buyers recommended by the students.

Case Study is provided by the University of Tennessee College of Business Administration. For more information contact Cindy Raines at craines1@utk.edu.