Spoons Kitchen Exchange

Community Partner: Marielle Saums

Team Members: Tishyaa Chaudhry, Sharon Ren, Helen Zheng

February 15, 2024

Table of Contents

Community Partner Background

1. [About the Organization](#_x7y3aay0jzgk)
2. [Programs](#_krm2svrqmkkp)
3. [Staff](#_ocyqxhticvni)
4. [Technology Management](#_8dj9nus6xu3d)
5. [Technology Infrastructure](#_mm5ckccfdjtg)
6. [Technology Planning](#_3zi9klebof3y)
7. [Communication](#_d5yrgp3o11nc)
8. [Information Management](#_qquoz7alscnv)
9. [Business Systems](#_y79al7afarzc)

Community Project Partner Opportunity

1. [Project Opportunity](#_56dhjwjkw6bc)
2. [Proposed Project Vision](#_8p4h085rqohq)
3. [Expected Outcomes](#_x9updr88nn6)
4. [Feasibility](#_d0971e44e5g5)
5. [Risk Analysis](#_mawtrx1u6jn9)

### Community Partner Background

###### About the Organization

Spoons Kitchen Exchange is a resale shop that endeavors to provide sustainable and affordable resources for the kitchen. It was recently created, and based in Pittsburgh, though the shop is virtual, and spreads reach across the country. *The mission of Spoons is not only to provide affordable kitchenware, but to preach circular economy, sustainability, and being environmentally conscious among its community.* While Spoons is currently a small business, a goal for the organization is not only to accomplish its mission, but to serve as a community leader and provide resources for the community to practice sustainability. Currently, the community that it serves is aspirational home cooks in Pittsburgh with limited resources and budgets.

###### Programs

Because Spoons is still relatively new, the major programs that Spoons utilizes is its online resale shop. Currently, the site resembles a typical retail shop. Spoons has other processes, however, that are more relevant to the back-end of the business - for example, with acquiring any goods to be sold. More specifically, these processes include gathering resources and goods through estate sales, thrift shops, and more. From there, Marielle (who is currently the sole staff on the organization) would take the goods back to their apartment to create and take photos to be uploaded to the site. Because Spoons is a sustainable business, this process pushes more towards a circular economy, in which items are reused and refurbished when needed, reducing waste and allowing for quality items to be back in use.

In terms of technology, Shopify is the main form used, as it houses the website, as well as inventory management (that is directly created within Shopify), connecting any sales to the storage numbers and status of the goods sold. This allows for efficient access and updates to storage, and reduces room for error. Shopify stands out as a superior e-commerce solution compared to its alternatives due to its user-friendliness, extensive app integrations, and round-the-clock customer service. Shopify also offers abandoned cart recovery and substantial shipping discounts making it an ideal choice for Marielle, especially since they have past experience using it.

###### Staff

At the organization, Marielle manages everything single-handedly, utilizing a Mac for their tasks. They oversee the Shopify page, drawing from past experience in website building, but they have limited expertise in HTML/CSS or programming. While they possess a foundational understanding of relevant computer office applications, they may benefit from additional technologies for managing their inventory and taking product pictures. They currently take pictures of their products on their Iphone and upload them directly to their Shopify website. In addition to shopify they use the following websites and technologies for managing their business:

1. Zoom for meeting with their potential clients/partners
2. Notion for project management
3. Google Docs and the google suite for managing information that is not stored on the website
4. Gmail is their primary source of communication

Marielle plans to add maybe 1-2 more part-time people in the future probably within inventory/pop-ups and for dealing with logistics.

###### Technology Management

Currently, Spoons is completely operated by Marielle - as there are no other employees on board. Thus, technology management is exclusively overseen by Marielle who acts as the primary decision-maker and go-to person for all IT matters. This includes managing the technology infrastructure, handling problem-solving and troubleshooting, addressing maintenance tasks for equipment, and serving as the de facto IT support. They rely extensively on online support for any bugs/technical problems they experience with their web app. However, looking forward, they plan on bringing on 1-2 part-time employees that can take roles within managing technology. In situations where external support is needed, they may escalate issues and contract with external support providers, such as independent contractors. Additionally, Marielle will take the lead in making decisions related to data security and privacy, ensuring compliance with regulations and implementing necessary measures within the small-scale organizational structure.

###### Technology Infrastructure

| Component | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Hardware | MacBook Pro(13-inch,2020 4 TBT3) for primary computing |
|  | iPhone 13 for photography and Shopify mobile access |
| Network | Home WiFi connection |
| Internet Connection | High-speed residential broadband |
| Operating System (OS) | macOS on MacBook and iOS on iPhone |
| Peripherals | None beyond standard MacBook and iPhone accessories |
| Software Programs | Shopify web application accessed via browser |
|  | Shopify mobile app for on-the-go management and updates |
|  | Zoom, Google Docs, Notion and Gmail |

Potential Problems:

Single Point of Failure: Reliance on few devices for all computing needs may lead to disruptions in case of hardware failure especially when the business grows and there are high sales.

Suggested Improvements/Solutions:

With the addition of employees in the future, the single point of failure problem would be addressed. Also, since all product information is stored on Shopify and not on Marielle’s computer, potential problems could be resolved by purchasing new hardware.

###### Technology Planning

As the sole decision maker of Spoons, Marielle is responsible for planning and budgeting their technology infrastructure. Since Spoons is a relatively small company at the current stage, it does not have a technology planning association and may not need one as well. Regarding the technical plan, although not formally written out, Marielle does have thoughts about whether to install some infrastructures or not, mostly based on the cost of the infrastructure and its substitutability. In the absence of substantial funding and labor, Spoons also has some problems with its information management. For instance, Marielle might sometimes skip the process of uploading some products’ information to their database – the online website built using Shopify – if the products were purchased and sold in a relatively short period of time. Moreover, Marielle often complains about the manual effort required to input product information and upload product images through Shopify. However, since we haven't found any companies similar to Spoons yet, we were unable to compare its use of technology to that of other companies.

###### Communication

As Spoons currently only has Marielle on board, communication is not quite an essential part within Spoons. However, files and information is often shared through Notion and Google Drive, with extra care in not revealing private information in any public manner.

###### 

###### Information Management

The critical information for the business is the product and customer information. Information about the products sold is done using Shopify but Marielle finds it daunting and confusing at times.The shopify app documentation is generally okay but it has limited tech support is offered depending on the company since Shopify has a market of independent app developers. Some of the current apps they are using have good online support and that was one of the primary reasons they chose to use those for their website.

Managing all electronically across mobile and laptop devices presents a challenge for cash flow management, particularly during pop-up events and inventory sourcing runs. The frustration is compounded by Shopify's subpar phone app and expensive POS system, costing around $300 per month. Occasionally, items are sold without being logged into the inventory system just to expedite sales during events.

###### Business Systems

Marielle doesn’t have an accountant yet, but they are currently trying to find one. They manage the accounting processes primarily through QuickBooks, as well as using it to bookkeeping tasks. Spoons has been using QuickBooks for less than a year and has not yet experienced any major errors. Nevertheless, Marielle is somewhat concerned about data security, as technology companies are often involved in cases that compromise user privacy. As of now, the quickbooks-based business system is sufficient for Marielle. However, they also think that a customized employee management application could be useful in the future, since they plan to employ one to two members. Regarding alternatives for Quickbook, there are many bookkeeping websites and apps similar to it and are all generally not very expensive. However, since Marielle doesn't have any major issues with bookkeeping, we suggest not to risk them having to learn and use a new website all over again.

### Community Project Partner Opportunity

###### Project Opportunity

Because Spoons is new, the current customer base is relatively small, with about 1.5K users that have visited the website since its start. Some customers heard Spoons from word of mouth, and about 71.8% of the users visited the site through search engine optimization, in which a user searches for an item and ends up on the Spoons website. Currently, the top three areas where online users are located consist of Pittsburgh, New York, and Ashburn, with Pittsburgh having around 105 users, and about twice the number of users compared to that of New York. The greater goal of Spoons is to be able to impact the larger Pittsburgh community, and potentially more in the United States. Marielle has also expressed the mission of Spoons being to not only practice circular economy, but to be able to serve everyone despite differences in background, income, etc.

Some major issues that often occur with retail websites are the confusing checkout process and the poor page navigation, which turn customers away. While many people peruse through online retail shops, the conversion from window shopping to actually checking out is often extremely low, at around 2.5%-3%. For Spoons, the conversion rate for reaching checkout is 1.78%, and to actually finish the order, this rate drops to 0.28%. Thus, identifying any struggles that customers may have with the checkout process and creating a user-friendly website is extremely important.

However, simply redesigning parts of the website will not immediately result in a bigger customer base - other actions should be taken in company with the redesign in order to move towards the goal. For instance, Spoons currently has zero marketing strategy and the majority of users are directed from search engines. It would therefore be beneficial to increase local outreach via social media, news, etc. depending on the customer base, and create a bigger focus on digital marketing platforms. Moreover, due to the uniqueness of each product, a lot of effort is invested in uploading and describing the items even with the ones that are of lesser value. In order to make more profits, it is crucial to find ways to reduce the sunk costs (efforts of uploading products) and to enhance the price of the items by providing extra values.

###### Proposed Project Vision

Our primary focus for this project is to enhance the marketing process of Spoons, particularly with its shopping website platform (built with Shopify). We aim to increase the number of customers that are buying from the site, as this will increase Spoons’ overall outreach, and allow for it to grow. We’ve identified three points of focus to offer additional value to Spoons: product offering, improvement in traffic, and an improvement on the UX/UI of the site.

First, we plan to conduct usability research and analysis on the target audience in order to understand any needs, frustrations, and pain points that users might encounter throughout the entire experience of shopping (from considering a product to clicking the “Checkout” button). Once we’ve gained a better understanding of the customer base, we plan to incorporate re-designs of the current website, which includes improving on how products are presented and offered. These explorations will include user persona considerations to ensure that pricing and usefulness of the products match our target personas. By improving the existing user interface, we aim to provide a smoother and more streamlined experience for both buyers and sellers using the website. With the re-design, we want to ensure that the site is reaching its target audience.

We also plan to engage in digital marketing, looking at different marketing systems and programs in order to scout for the most viable solution while allowing Spoons to reach their target audience. Currently, Spoons utilizes Google Analytics and Shopify’s built-in customer analytics, but we aim to gather more information in order to integrate mobile and social media marketing. We plan to have collaborations with Instagram/social media influencers to spread more awareness about the company's vision, mainly its focus on building a circular economy.

The project has a wide range of stakeholders and users, including the owner of Spoons, who is currently managing inventory by themselves. Buyers and sellers of cookware, as well as web browsers (potential buyers and sellers), are counted as the major stakeholders. Local businesses, community members interested in sustainable living, and potential IT contractors for future developments are also considered as key stakeholders.

Overall, these initiatives were designed to meet and enhance the user experience for people of all backgrounds who want to buy and sell cookware on the website, and to support Spoons Kitchen Exchange's mission of promoting the exchange of quality cookware within the Pittsburgh community.

**Alternatives**

Other possible alternatives include a complete redevelopment of the website, or use of other online website building templates, but they are deemed less viable due to integration complexities, cost implications and potential disruption to current operations. One alternative solution that we considered aimed to address a back-end struggle that Marielle experiences with inventory management within Shopify.

Another alternative we considered was building a custom Shopify app using an existing template on Github ([https://github.com/Shopify/shopify-app -template-ruby#](https://github.com/Shopify/shopify-app-template-ruby#)). The app would have been built using Ruby, which would automatically upload product images and basic information of the product by calling Shopify’s API after the client adds images to the app.

However, once we looked deeper within the business model, we understood that a core struggle within Spoons is increasing customer turnout. Thus, while this may be a viable solution, we believe that this can be a feature add-on given the time available. Due to the time constraint within the semester, focusing on narrowing the scope of the project to increasing customer statistics is ideal.

###### Expected Outcomes

We aim to increase Spoons' sales and profits by improving our current marketing strategy to increase the number of visitors to our website and the number of people who actually buy from us. To attain this goal, a combination of technical and strategic marketing approaches will be employed. We plan to conduct user research and gain a comprehensive understanding of the struggles of the target customers when using the website. We then refine our digital marketing strategies on utilizing social media channels and exploring partnerships with organizations that are related to kitchenware and/or second-hand products.

User Stories:

| As a… | I want… | So that… |
| --- | --- | --- |
| college student getting ready to graduate | to be able to sell or give away my appliances | I can reduce the amount of waste from goods that are still usable. |
| seller | to be able to easily find a way to sell my kitchenware | I can focus on other hobbies/interests without worrying about where my items are going. |
| buyer | to view detailed product information and quality images | I can make informed decisions with confidence in the kitchenware's condition. |
| owner of Spoons | to have information of the products on certain aspects from the seller | I can know if the product aligns with my shop’s mission or not. |
| Pittsburgh community member | to buy and sell kitchenware through a local platform | I can minimize shipping times and make my life easier. |

Main features:

| Features | Details | Priority |
| --- | --- | --- |
| User Research and Analysis | * Gather information on the struggles users have in completing the payment process. * Gather information on the needs of a seller inquiry form. | Essential |
| Digital Marketing Strategy Refinement | * Develop strategies based on information gained from user research. | Essential |
| Social Media Strategy | * Develop a social media promotion strategy. | Essential |
| Partnerships with Relevant Organizations | * Identify and establish partnerships with organizations related to kitchenware and second-hand products. | Non-  essential |

Below are the steps our team decided to take to ensure that we successfully update the current marketing strategies and meet the client's goals.

Steps:

1. Start a kickoff meeting with Marielle.
   1. Gather insights into the goals of Marielle.
   2. Familiarize ourselves with the current marketing strategies and website layouts.
2. Schedule meetings with Marielle and conduct user research to gather user information for marketing and website redesign.
3. Develop a plan outlining tasks, timelines, and responsibilities for each team member.
4. Establish weekly check-in meetings to monitor progress, address any issues, and ensure alignment with project objectives and timelines.

Expected outcomes:

| Feature | Outcome | Baseline | Measurements |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| User Research and Analysis | Gain deep insights into the struggles of the users while using the website. | * Current conversion rate. * Number of seller inquiries received through email or phone. | * An increase in the conversion rate. * An increase in the number of inquiries. |
| Digital Marketing Strategy Refinement | Develop refined digital marketing strategies. | Current digital marketing metrics. | Improvements in engagement rates, click-through rates, conversion rates. |
| Social Media Strategy | Increase brand awareness and engagement through use of social media channels. | Current social media metrics. | Growth in followers, engagement rates, reach, and positive brand sentiment. |
| Partnerships with Relevant Organizations | Expand brand reach through collaborative marketing efforts and co-promotions with partner organizations. | Current level of partnerships and collaborative marketing efforts. | An increase in sales. |

###### Feasibility

Project feasibility will comprise the following:

Technical Feasibility:

The team is well-versed in web development and have studied digital marketing techniques in depth which form the core of the project. Existing technologies – Shopify and Google Analytics support the project requirements. We will use existing templates from the Shopify store to build a custom Shopify app as required for the project. If there are issues with using pre-existing templates we will develop custom components using Ruby on Rails. These Custom components will be thoroughly tested to ensure seamless integration.We will also provide extensive written documentation and training for any custom or pre-existing app used. Therefore, the consulting team has the requisite skills to execute the project.

Operational Feasibility:

The project aligns with Spoons' mission and goals and will streamline operational processes. The user(Marielle) will be trained to ensure seamless operational migration to any new tools used for marketing or web development. We will also make video and written tutorials for the same so that future Spoons employees do not face any issues. The team expects that Spoons will be able to maintain and operate the proposed enhancements in the system on an ongoing basis.

Financial Feasibility:

The team will leverage existing technologies and carry out in-house development thereby minimizing financial investment for Spoons. However, marketing spends will have to be made, that are expected to be covered by increased sales and outreach.

Timeline Feasibility:

The project is expected to be completed well within the expected timelines by including testing and user training. The team will conduct market research to finetune and finalize the project scope well in time to ensure there are no delays on account of increase in scope of the project

###### 

###### Risk Analysis

The following risks are associated with the project development along with the respective mitigation strategies.

Market Risks:

The redesigned website may not immediately translate into increased sales. Users may not find the new website interface user-friendly. However, this risk will be mitigated by extensive market research so that the redesigned website addresses the real needs of the customer and results in the expected level of customer engagement.

Technical Risks:

The custom app development, if required, may encounter unforeseen technical challenges. However, we plan to mitigate the same through collaboration with Shopify's developer community and by using existing templates from GitHub.

Operational Risks:

Marielle might be overwhelmed by the increase in the scope of Spoons on both the technical and marketing aspects and might need additional hires in case their bandwidth becomes a constraint. Marielle will be actively involved in the decision-making on the scope and complexity of the project and the team will adjust the scope, complexity, and training modules accordingly.

Financial Risks:

Unforeseen expenses might arise while defining the scope of the marketing outreach and accordingly impact the website redesign/app development phase. However, budget planning and review, which would include contingency planning would be done with Marielle across the development phase. Prioritization of development features and marketing spending will be done as needed.

Time Risks:

These could be unexpected delays in website redesign or marketing but the team would adopt agile project management techniques to mitigate this risk. The team would hold regular monitoring and review meetings with the client.