



Selling sex in the city: is gay Sydney begging for more?

Project Proposal

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24790 Business Project: Marketing (Capstone)

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Introduction to the research problem

Established in 1991, Bodyline Spa & Sauna was Sydney's first lawfully-established gay bathhouse. While it was initially denied development approval by the local council, that decision was later overturned by the courts who ruled in the venue's favour, setting the precedent for the many sex-on-premises venues that were to follow. "Before the internet and chatrooms, they were a real meeting place where you could be yourself, amongst like-minded men and amongst community. But that still stands today: especially for those who live alone. Some still go as much for the community connection as the sex." (Vaughan, as cited in Nunn, 2022).

For almost thirty years, Bodyline was a popular and profitable business enterprise, serving the needs of the gay and bisexual community in Sydney. In mid-2018, the premises were leased to a new operator but under new management and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bodyline closed only eighteen months later, telling the gay community on social media "they can go fuck themselves" (Harrigan, 2021).

It is this expression of the management's attitude toward its clientele, that is similarly reflected in an apparent disregard given to hygiene and the upkeep of the venue's amenities, that is thought to have caused the demise of Sydney's premiere sex-on-premises venue, more so than the effect of the pandemic's stay-at-home health orders restricting recreation and people from gathering in groups. Because while Bodyline dived, the competition thrived, as alternative venues for the gay community to meet and socialise, throwing parties and hosting ticketed events at a time when the formerly frequented bars and clubs on Oxford Street could only open with reduced capacities, if allowed to open at all.

Waking from its coronavirus slumber, Bodyline was renovated by the original owner and reopened in late October 2023 adhering to its previously successful business model, "however since its recent reopening, it struggled to regain its former glory" (Dovans & Frappell, as cited in Hirst, 2024) and within six months, the iconic sex-on-premises venue had closed its doors yet again, with the business ceasing operations after failing to break even.

Fast forward to today and rival sauna 357 has now taken possession, rebranding the Taylor Street site Sauna X "maintaining 357's legacy of inclusivity and acceptance" (Dovans &

Frappell, as cited in James, 2024) and “promising the same staff, parties, and welcoming atmosphere that defined the original venue” (Dovans & Frappell).

This research project aims to determine whether adopting the previously proven ‘business as usual’ approach to operating the twice failed sex-on-premises venue will still satisfy the needs of their clientele or is gay Sydney now wanting more than they did before?

- Who goes to a sex-on-premises venue and why do they go?
- What criteria is used to choose one venue over another?
- What opportunities exist within the market where expectations have not been met?

Informing the answers to these questions, the research objectives are to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the reasons why men go to sex-on-premises venues and their needs being met
- Identify the servicescape factors used by sex-on-premises venues as points of differentiation in market segmentation
- Discover the relevance of these factors to the customer experience and their influence on preference of venue

Proposed methods by which the problem will be researched

Primary data will be collected through qualitative research, conducting interviews with select informants holding first-hand experience of sex on premises venue management or other relevant academic expertise. Quantitative research will also be conducted by surveying a snowballed sample of typical venue clientele, with the anonymous results collected as primary data for statistical analysis.

Secondary data obtained by literature review of published materials from a variety of online sources will be used to supplement the report research.

Ethical consideration will be given to the preservation of survey respondents’ anonymity with no personally identifying information collected as part of this research ensuring a respondent’s right to privacy. Other primary data while researching this project will only be collected with the informed consent of the participant, an information sheet having been provided outlining the details of the project first.

The benefits to the organisation

Findings from this research project will seek to inform the management of Sauna X by 357 regarding the design of the venue's servicescape and offer strategic marketing recommendations for reclaiming market share from competing sex-on-premises venues.

Schedule

	WEEK COMMENCING							
TASK	26-Aug	2-Sep	9-Sep	16-Sep	23-Sep	3-Oct	7-Oct	14-Oct
Project planning								
Surveying respondents								
Interviews with management								
Literature review								
Compiling research data								
Analysis of data								
Prepare recommendations								
Writing of report								

References

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<https://www.facebook.com/bodylinesyd/posts/4104248256271047>
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- James, M. (2024, March 30). *Bodyline building hosts new home for Sydney gay sauna 357*. Star Observer. <https://www.starobserver.com.au/news/bodyline-building-hosts-new-home-for-sydney-gay-sauna-357/229635>
- Nunn, G. (2022, January 31). *How are sex on premises venues surviving the pandemic?* Sydney Sentinel. <https://sydneyssentinel.com.au/2022/01/how-are-sex-on-premises-venues-surviving-the-pandemic/>