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Abstract

Minor League Baseball organization, the Clinton LumberKings, located in Clinton, Iowa, collaborated with students from the University of Iowa that researched various concepts to enhance the products of the LumberKings and business in the downtown Clinton area. The student consultants met with representatives from the Clinton LumberKings, City of Clinton, and the Downtown Clinton Alliance. Through research, the student consultants generated ideas to enhance the team's presence throughout the city, locate target markets, design unique promotional events, and find potential naming rights partners.

Keywords: Minor League Baseball, economic development, naming rights, revenue, partnerships, Office of Outreach and Engagement, student consulting

Context

Sports and Recreation Management graduate students from the University of Iowa, participated in a Capstone project with the Clinton LumberKings, a Minor League Baseball organization. Through this project, the students worked with various people and enterprises such as the Downtown Clinton Alliance, Clinton City Administration, a University of Iowa Office of Outreach and Engagement staff, and University of Iowa faculty. These groups were able to meet in Clinton to discuss this project in further detail to determine what objectives each party would like to accomplish.

Ted Tornow, the Clinton LumberKings General Manager, discussed goals he has for the organization and how the Sports Management consultants could assist him in those goals. Currently, Ted has been the General Manager of the LumberKings for 20 seasons, including 34 seasons overall in professional baseball. Karen Rowell, Director for the Downtown Clinton Alliance, spoke on the DCA's mission and what they are capable of doing for the city. Karen was able to share with the consultants some successes she has seen during her time as the DCA Director. Her valuable insight gave the consultants an idea on how to build on the already successful events that have taken place. Matt Brooke, Clinton City Administrator, discussed previous projects the city has done and the types of success they have seen. He also mentioned additional goals he has for the city moving forward and how this project could generate useful ideas.

This project was not only made possible by the representatives in Clinton. University of Iowa faculty was a valuable resource in consultation throughout the project. Travis Kraus, Economic Development and Sustainability Director for the UI Office of Outreach and Engagement, was able to assist due to his background in economic development, an uncharted area to the Sports Management consultants. Travis has built a network through various projects he has been a part of and connected the students with the right people in order for them to gather information. Patrick Moran, University of Iowa

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professor, managed and lead the graduate students every step of the way. Patrick's expertise in guiding students through experiential learning projects, as well as collaborating with the students, was significant in making this project possible.

Literature Review

In order for a recommendation to have value, it must be backed by in-depth, quality research. The research was conducted by reading many forms of literature in relation to what the Capstone project would entail. One component that was examined throughout the literature was finding the best recommended practices to enhance a sports organization's presence in the community. The consultants found this to be a vital aspect of the Capstone project since increasing impressions for the LumberKings would ultimately drive attendance and revenue. Although Minor League Baseball is professional baseball, these teams operate on a low budget and any boost of revenue is significant. One article examined, *"How to Bring Business to Small Towns"*, particularly stood out since Clinton has a population of 26,000 people. Not too small, and not too big - just the right size for a Minor League Baseball team to exist. The article points out the necessary steps to take in order for community members to get on board with the ideas organized by the baseball team. It touched on key factors that the LumberKings already do such as, involving the local newspaper, getting the chamber of commerce involved, as well as marketing to the community (Jannen, 2017). The consultants reflected on all of these aspects and developed ideas in similar realms.

Another component that was examined through literature was the idea of target marketing. Tapping into specific markets has become more accessible due to the impact of technology on society. Organizations are able to get their product in front of more people due to the progression and popularity of social media. Social media serves as the most sensible marketing tactic in order to reach a large audience for the lowest price. Although this is true, consumers appreciate when they are target marketed, making them feel more valued as a customer. An interview with a local business owner in Clinton confirmed that social media and direct mail are key marketing tactics their business uses (Interview, 2018). Direct mail is one way to accomplish both getting your product in front of customers and making them feel more valued. Some direct mail

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examples in sport send coupons, much like the LumberKings already do. Other examples include promoting sponsors that are affiliated with the sport organization. Direct mailing has been shown to be successful and worthwhile considering the relatively low cost.

The last component the consultants address pertains to the search for a new naming rights partner for the stadium where the LumberKings play. Examining other naming rights partnerships in sports that have been implemented was the first step. Some things that were taken into consideration included who is the partner, how long is the contract, how much is the deal worth, and does it make sense for all parties? *Ballpark Digest* served as a key source by combining numerous articles written regarding naming rights in sports. These articles not only shared many fascinating partnerships, but helped brainstorm ideas for how the consultants could serve the LumberKings. Overall, some organizations chose to partner with major brands, while some organizations chose local partners in hopes of boosting the local economy.



Strengthening Relationships

The existing relationship between the City of Clinton and the LumberKings is friendly. Matt Brooke and Ted Tornow frequently work together in order to accomplish projects that Ted deems necessary to help his organization. Karen Rowell also works closely with Ted to host a “Downtown Clinton Alliance Night”, where local businesses gather at the ballpark to promote the city of Clinton. After the initial meeting, the consultants began developing recommendations that would mutually benefit each organization. Since Ted, Matt, and Karen are familiar with how each organization operates, strengthening the already existing relationship was the main focus. Ultimately, the consultants found three areas to address in the Capstone project; an entry level, middle level, and large scale recommendation. With these three recommendations, Ted, Matt, and Karen, are getting recommendations that are backed by extensive literary research, as well as professionals in sport business and economic development.



Small Business Development Center

One area of concern that was brought to the attention of the consultants during the meeting in Clinton involved many housing and business vacancies. The first recommendation from the consultants involves bringing new business to the city of Clinton in hopes of addressing that concern.

The idea of the first recommendation by the consultants was created due to a previous idea by Deb Brown. She has served as the Director of the Chamber of Commerce for Webster City, Iowa. Deb faced the challenge of being a director of Webster City where there were twelve building vacancies. In small town Iowa, the impact of twelve businesses can make a significant impact on a community. Webster City needed new businesses in town to help develop their town and have positive economic growth. To get businesses in town, Deb wanted the world to know that Webster City was looking for new businesses and would welcome anyone with open arms. Tours of the vacant buildings would be provided and the building developers cleaned up the buildings to be presentable for those tours. Deb got multiple business owners to come view the opportunities in these vacant buildings in Webster City. The news of these tours spread and after two years on the job, Deb filled ten out of the twelve vacant buildings replaced with new businesses (Brown, 2013). This success has made Webster City a vibrant and upcoming town.

The consultants knew this would be a great idea to implement for the city of Clinton. Finding commonalities between all parties involved in the Capstone project in order to make this recommendation successful was the next step. Creating an event that brought people to town to tour vacant buildings would ideally make a similar impact on Clinton, as the example described in Webster City. With the help of the LumberKings, the consultants had a way for both the City of Clinton, and the LumberKings baseball organization to benefit by bringing new business to the city of Clinton.

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Hosted by the LumberKings, business owners from eastern Iowa and western Illinois would be invited to attend a business fair event at the ballpark, as well as tour vacancies in the city. The business representatives that would be invited would be affiliated with Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) or the Clinton Chamber of Commerce. Reaching out to Regional Directors of SBDC's in eastern Iowa to share information with business owners will help spread word of the event taking place in Clinton. With various business representatives at the ballpark, realtors and city developers would also be in attendance to socialize amongst the groups. Ideally, the business representatives in attendance are looking to expand their brand and would be willing to consider locating their business in Clinton. The likelihood of filling some of the housing and business vacancies increases, the more business owners that are made aware of the SBDC event.

To capitalize on this recommendation, the consultants suggest holding the event when the LumberKings host a game at night. Attendees would arrive to the stadium and socialize before getting a tour of the vacancies in Clinton. During this tour, the visitors would have the chance to look at the available properties, whether they are housing complexes, or vacated buildings for business. After the tour, the attendees would arrive back at the stadium for a LumberKings game that night. Since the left field concourse is typically full of baseball fans by the concessions and playground, opening the right field concourse for the SBDC attendees would give them a secluded area for them to socialize and network with other like-minded entrepreneurs (see below). This area is located away from the main gate to avoid the casual fan passing through and disrupting potential meetings.

For twenty dollars, the attendees would secure their game ticket, a food and drink voucher to use during the game, and their tour of the vacancies. Not only is this a bargain deal for the attendees, but Ted is generating revenue by having more fans in attendance. The consultants believe giving like-minded individuals, such as investors,

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the opportunity to tour properties in Clinton, and gather at a baseball game for such a low price, would be enough of an enticing offer to get them to come. This recommendation further strengthens the relationship between the city of Clinton and the baseball organization.



Targeted Marketing

Through literary research, interviews with business owners, and consultation from professionals, the second recommendation involves the idea of targeted marketing. An interview with a business owner in Clinton helped point the consultants in the direction of proposing direct mail to enhance marketing. The local business owner stated, “Clinton is very responsive to direct mail and social media. I love using social and direct mail to target certain zip codes in my area” (Interview, 2018). Although social media may be the easiest and cheapest form of marketing, research suggested that direct mail would be the best option for this project. This recommendation suggests a direct mail component that allows the LumberKings and Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID) members to locate who is coming to Clinton and continue to market to those individuals.

By including SSMID members in the direct mail or advertorial, businesses are inviting everyone to visit Clinton, not just baseball consumers. The direct mail piece can be as simple as a postcard with coupons on it or it could be something with more narrative to it like a brochure. The consultants believed that more narrative to talk about the DCA and the businesses involved with the SSMID, would be best to promote the businesses. This marketing tactic has proven to be successful with and recipients appreciate mail directed towards them. Since the mail piece would rely heavily on SSMID contribution, paying for this relatively low marketing promotion could be achieved with SSMID tax dollars.

The area of focus for the direct mail is along the I-88 corridor in western Illinois, as well as the Clinton community. This area in Illinois was specifically targeted due to its proximity to Clinton and surrounding cities that have Minor League Baseball. The consultants believe that marketing as far east to Dixon, Illinois, and as far south to Erie, Illinois, would result in the best mail response. These particular towns are within driving

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distance to Clinton, without marketing to residents in the Chicagoland, or Quad City area. This tactic would bring Illinois residents to Iowa to spend money at businesses downtown, boosting the local economy.

In order for this recommendation to be successful and turnkey, the consultants researched businesses in Clinton that would be able to fulfill this type of mailing request. Fortunately, the Clinton Printing Company, which has been in business since 1960, said they would be able to accomplish just that. The company's plethora of direct mail options made them an enticing partner with an exceptional amount of experience in the business. They shared with the consultants their ability to distribute this type of request and a keen interest in doing so if this idea came to fruition. Their ability to produce multiple designs without any limits may be worth considering.

The direct mail or advertorial concept is a recommendation that should be implemented by the LumberKings and SSMID members due to the response rate by community members and their interest in direct mail. SSMID members already do some types of marketing that is similar; therefore this would not be out of the ordinary. This recommendation builds off the first recommendation, both of which the consultants believe would benefit all parties.

Use of the Stadium Asset

After the meeting in Clinton, Ted addressed the search for a new stadium naming rights partner with the LumberKings, since the previous contract expired with Ashford University. The consultants felt compelled to help Ted locate a potential partner since a naming rights deal is vital to the operating budget of a Minor League Baseball team. Ted believed a naming rights partnership for the stadium would be estimated around \$50,000. With that, the third recommendation from the consultants will be regarding the future naming rights of the baseball stadium. A copious amount of literary research was done in order to give Ted the best recommendation for stadium naming rights. Naming rights partnerships in Minor League Baseball, among other sports, offered ideas on how to find compatible partners across the country. Ultimately, the consultants believed that the best partner for the LumberKings resides right in Clinton.

The Downtown Clinton Alliance is the recommended partner for the Clinton LumberKings and new stadium naming rights partnership. The proposal to make the DCA the lead naming rights partner makes sense for both the DCA, and the LumberKings. The partnership would make the DCA the leading naming rights partner, making them the most prioritized partner of the LumberKings, while enhancing their brand. The idea of using the name of the stadium as a marketing tactic, while still promoting the DCA, could sound more appealing. Welcoming fans to “Rediscover Downtown Clinton Stadium, presented by *SSMID Business*”, may leave more of an impression on a baseball fan.

Since the DCA has SSMID members, this would allow for the members to be the presenting sponsor of select home series. The consultants looked at the 2019 LumberKings baseball schedule and selected home series that would demand the premium pricing for the series sponsorship. The selection of these premium series starts with the opening weekend followed by another weekend series on May 20th. The

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first weekend in May and a home series with the Cedar Rapids Kernels on the 18th would provide great crowd opportunities. In June, the first weekend and last weekend appeared to be the best options for premium pricing. In July, the 4th would be the best option, expecting a large attendance. Lastly in August, the series against Burlington was chosen due to that series being the last series before students end their summer break. Premium pricing will ultimately be determined by the Clinton LumberKings. The consultants highlighted some series, but did not choose every weekend as premium pricing, although the LumberKings could choose that option if they wish. Weekday games will not be considered a premium series, since there will be a smaller attendance, thus decreasing the dollar amount to be the presenting sponsor.

The consultants estimate that the partnership with the DCA will be valued well above the \$50,000 mark that Ted was originally seeking. Understandably, asking the DCA for \$50,000 to be the leading naming rights partner would be a tall order. The consultants estimate that the LumberKings could ask for \$30,000, while the remaining money could be obtained from presenting sponsors through the 22 home series in 2019 (see graph).

Downtown Clinton Alliance	\$30,000
SSMID Sponsor (Premium)	\$3,000
SSMID Sponsor (Premium)	\$2,000
SSMID Sponsor (Premium)	\$2,000
SSMID Sponsor (Non-premium)	\$1,000
SSMID Sponsor (Non-premium)	\$1,000
SSMID Sponsor (Non-premium)	\$500
Total	\$50,000 +

Partner Benefits

The businesses affiliated with the Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District pay tax dollars for projects to help boost the image of the city. The money coming from the SSMID could now be used to have part ownership and equity in the stadium. This allows for SSMID partners to have input on the marketing of their business throughout the stadium for patrons to see. Some of the locations where signage could be included are throughout the concourse on digital screens, as well as more permanent signage on the walls. Putting signage throughout the concourse is a great tool for marketing and would leave an incredible amount of impressions on fans at the stadium.

Signage on the scoreboard is another area that SSMID businesses could be promoted, especially with the proposed lead naming rights partnership with the DCA. The scoreboard welcoming fans to “Rediscover Downtown Clinton Stadium” would look better with signage of SSMID businesses as well. Capitalizing on areas throughout the stadium will increase revenue for Ted and keep partners satisfied. Additional signage on the windscreen is suggested, due to the large number of impressions this will have on fans. The windscreen would be visible from every seat in the stadium which is valuable in terms of marketing. This marketing could be done for the DCA since it would be more permanent, or temporary windscreen signage for the presenting sponsor could be done as well. Having temporary signage would cost more to the LumberKings, but would be a nice touch for the presenting sponsor. Ultimately, heightening the awareness of the DCA and SSMID members through signage and promotion, will keep partners satisfied with their relationship to the LumberKings.

Conclusion

The recommendations suggested by the student consultants were done in the best interest of the Clinton LumberKings, City of Clinton, and the Downtown Clinton Alliance. The consultants believe that with these tiered recommendations of entry level, middle level, and large scale, the benefits for all parties certainly outweigh any costs that may arise in the implementation process. The recommendations described throughout this Capstone project have been tediously analyzed and thought through. Not only are the recommendations considered to be feasible, but the recommendations are supported by research, literature analysis, and professionals in their respected field.

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