

You need more than a gut feeling

At an event last week, I met the owner of a local pizza shop. This pizza shop, which opened about a year ago, is located near me, and seems pretty busy, especially on weekends. I asked him how it's doing. The pizza shop owner immediately said it was doing poorly, and he said the parking situation was to blame. That seemed strange to me since there's plenty of garage parking, which, with validation, is free for two hours. He told me that it doesn't matter, because psychologically, people don't like to pay for parking. And here's a direct quote from him: "I have friends who can spend \$500 on dinner but they won't pay for parking."

OK. I am sure there are people who avoid going places where they have to pay for parking. But I also don't think free parking with validation, and a couple bucks an hour after is the one reason people will avoid going out to dinner.

I have been thinking about this situation for a few days, and I have concluded that this shop owner is looking for an easy excuse for what may be poor business and marketing decisions on his part.

Here are three possible mistakes he has made:

Not scouting or researching the location carefully enough.

This particular location has several other restaurants, and the parking situation has not changed in several years. He could have asked the other restaurants if they felt the parking was a challenge. He could have determined how many people walk or take public transportation to get here and how many people drive, and from where. He could have checked out if people complain about parking.

Biting off more than he can chew. This particular restaurant

took over two spaces (one had been a restaurant and the other a shoe store). It is a very large place with both indoor and outdoor seating. Perhaps the space is too big with a rent that is too high to support the amount of people that will eat out here.

Not doing enough marketing (and marketing poorly). When the place opened, I joined the Facebook page for it. It seems that they are doing a few things to entice the community, like a trivia night and a pet adoption event. Now, I am not sure how having a pet adoption event at a restaurant is even a legal idea, and at best is a bit strange idea that may attract pet lovers. I have seen little to promote events in the community and very little creativity. Also, and I kid not, the sponsored Facebook ads promote their top sirloin beef burgers. This is a pizza joint and they should focus on their area of expertise. If you want a burger while everyone else wants pizza, it's good they have alternatives for you. But if you want a really great burger, you are not going to a pizza restaurant for it.

Perhaps this pizza place owner's gut told him that parking is the real issue. But a gut feeling does not mean that it's the correct reason to explain a situation. If he truly wants to improve his situation, he'd commission market research and/or hire a restaurant marketing consultant. He needs facts and actions rather than the feeling that parking, something that will not change and he cannot control, is hurting his business.

What do you think? Does it all amount to parking or may there be other reasons?