

Marketing for Small Business Escape Rooms and the Importance of Experiential Learning

Ken Brubaker
Ashland University

René Rawraway
Ashland University

Abigail G. McMaster
Ashland University

A semi-rural Ohio escape room collaborated with a local university for an experiential learning initiative, aiming to attract more college students, retain current customers, and enhance marketing strategies. Two questionnaires were employed: one targeting college students and the other existing customers. Findings revealed a higher attendance of upperclassmen students at the escape room and email as the preferred mode of communication. Moreover, a significant correlation between escape room experience, games, food, drinks, and overall satisfaction was observed. The customer-focused survey indicated the primary demographic as individuals aged eighteen to twenty-nine, with a high satisfaction rate of ninety-seven and a half percent. Additionally, sixty-three percent expressed interest in returning for a new escape room design.

Keywords: marketing, small businesses, escape rooms, experiential learning

INTRODUCTION

An escape room is a room in which a small group of people use clues to figure out how to exit or escape the room they are in. An escape room in a semi-rural area of Ohio teamed up with a semi-rural university in close proximity to better market their facility to college students. The goals of this project are, (1) to increase the presence of college students at this particular escape room, (2) retain their current customers, and (3) engage in an experiential learning project, as a result, working with an area university to better market their small business.

The project is an exercise in experiential learning. Experiential learning is taking classroom concepts and applying them to real world problems. It is a more active form of learning compared to the passive form of just listening to lectures. A major research question of this project is: What is the impact that experiential learning has on small businesses.

Another major research question in this research article is: What is the impact and benefits of universities working with small businesses? Some of the things attempted in this experiential learning

project was; (1) Developing a marketing plan, (2) Developing and delivering surveys to college students and the escape room's current customers, and (3) analyzing and interpreting results from the participants' responses. A marketing plan is a critically important document because marketing plans can help guide a business and give it a defined direction for future performance. It is crucial for marketing plans to have measurable goals, so then during business operations, it can be noted how close the business comes to fulfilling those goals. Also, any preexisting data regarding the business, that should be included to generate the goals to help one can measure if there was an improvement.

Lastly, it is important to look at the characteristics of existing successful escape rooms, their learning objectives, who their target market is, and what they do to reach those target markets. One interesting aspect of escape rooms are the differences when located in a large city, a small town, or a tourist destination. In larger cities, there is a larger audience of people. Tourist destinations have a greater turnover and may have a larger audience coming through their doors. A college town, or semi-rural area, has new students every year, but is different from a tourist destination where new people may come in every week.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Description of Escape Rooms

Escape rooms are a relatively new form of entertainment that are found all over the world. Escape rooms are defined by Professor Scott Nicholson (2015), a professor of game design and development at Wilfrid Laurier University in Brantford, Ontario, Canada as, "live action team based games where players discover clues, solve puzzles, and accomplish tasks in one or more rooms in order to accomplish a specific goal (usually escaping from the room) in a limited amount of time" (p. 1). The first well documented escape room was opened in Japan in 2007. Room popularity grew quickly from 2012 to 2013 first in Asia, then Europe, and lastly the Americas (Nicholson, 2015, p. 3).

Since they are still a relatively new phenomenon, not much research has been done on them in terms of what marketing strategies work to attract customers and the demographics of those customers. According to one study that was last updated in 2015 by Professor Scott Nicholson entitled *Peeking Behind the Locked Door: A Survey of Escape Room Facilities* does give some insight into these questions. Nicholson received responses from 175 escape rooms located around the world and asked them about the types of room they have, pricing for their rooms, their customer demographics, and where their rooms were located (p. 1).

First, the most popular number of escape rooms for an escape room facility to have is two. 27 percent of facilities worldwide have two rooms. The worldwide average of hours open per week is 60, but in North and South America facilities are more likely to be open around 40 hours per week. It is very popular for more escape rooms to enter an area once one is opened. In one case in Toronto, Canada the first escape room opened in October 2013 and by January of 2015 there were 45. However, this is not an isolated example, but a growth pattern that has been observed in other cities. Pricing structure depends on the market regarding whether the facilities charge per group, per person, or another way. Often once one escape room enters the area, that pricing model is followed by all others that enter. The average price per person of escape rooms worldwide is \$23.68 USD (Nicholson, 2015, pp. 9-11).

As reported by Nicholson's (2015) research, 19 percent of people who visit an escape room are young adults under the age of 21. However, data also shows escape rooms appeal to all demographics. Couples come in on dates, corporate or school groups participate for team bonding, families with children enjoy themselves, and adults of all ages can have fun. The same goes for genders; both men and women enjoy escape rooms. Some themes appeal more to men or to women, but overall both genders can have fun. In fact, groups that have had the most success in the rooms are often groups of mixed genders (pp. 7, 15, 2).

According to Nicholson (2015), a problem that escape rooms face is replayability. Once, an escape room has been solved, it is often not as much fun to have the experience again. He suggests designing rooms for replayability. This involves being able to have different puzzles or a different ending. Replayability must be thought about from the beginning stages of design, and can result in repeat business when planned (pp. 26-28).

Learning With Escape Rooms

In keeping with Nicholson (2015), 30 percent of the escape rooms surveyed stated that they have positive learning outcomes from working through escape rooms. The most popular goal stated was teamwork and communication (p. 24). Other research has also documented the benefits of team building from escape rooms. In a 2018 study by Christine Wu, Heather Wagenschutz, and Justine Hein, the researchers describe how team building and the leadership skills taught in medical school can be enforced by escape rooms. The researchers took a group of 26 medical students to an escape room and all the students said they would recommend it to others. They even made connections to how this exercise could relate to their future careers, “One student connected the Escape Room activity to their future medical careers as ‘. . . working as a team and using individual expertise to integrate and solve problems’” (p. 561).

There have been several studies done where teachers or professors have designed escape rooms to foster skills taught within their own disciplines. For example, Professor Wendy Rouse of San Jose State University did research published in 2017 on using escape rooms to teach the basic analysis of historical documents to high school students. This exercise was a success and something that she encouraged other teachers to try (pp. 558-563). Also, in 2017, Professor Kimberly Humphrey designed an escape room used by her sport and exercise psychology students at the University of Chichester. In keeping with Humphrey (2017), while hosting a debrief of the activity with her students they were able to successfully identify what they had learned and appreciated the change in teaching style. She goes on to say, “Students highlighted that they felt the experience enabled them to develop real-world skills such as teamwork, problem solving, communication, leadership, observational and mathematical skills” (p. 53). In both studies, it was stated about how teamwork and communication skills were the results of these activities in addition to the disciplines they were trying to teach.

Experiential Learning

According to Munoz, Miller, and Poole, 2016 students are likely to be retained in Professional Student Organizations due to networking with professionals and activities that involve professional development. Furthermore, these researchers state that college faculties should concentrate their efforts on implementing experiential learning activities that enhance the working relationship between faculty/mentor and student, career exploration, and skill development. As a result, these researchers conclude that this will increase student recruitment and retention for Professional Student Organizations. According to Erdogan Kumcu and Ash Kumcu (1998), experiential learning is an active teaching technique where students take the classroom knowledge that they know and apply it to real life scenarios. They view it as a way for students to gain competence and real-world experience before graduating. The professors developed and implemented a way to use it with international business majors. They had their students consult small businesses on their international marketing and exporting strategies. They consulted many different types of businesses. Not only did the students benefit from working in the experiential learning environment, but it was a great help to the small businesses as well. E. Kumcu and A. Kumcu continue that the businesses gained valuable insights on their marketing and that this help was free. This makes it possible for small businesses that do not have the money for a professional marketer to still receive worthwhile findings regarding their businesses (pp. 59-70).

Professor John E. Swan and Professor Scott W. Hansen of the University of Alabama conducted research that was published in 1996 on how to design and implement experiential learning into their marketing classrooms. The researchers designed a program called CAPS, Client Adaptive Problem Solving. This was a team project where the teams worked for a small business client to solve problems in the real world while still receiving a grade from their professor. They believe that programs such as CAPS make students’ learning relevant and can be very helpful for the clients involved (pp. 33-44).

According to Sandra Grunwell and Inhynch Ha (2014), a real-world way that experiential learning was used was in a small, rural, tourist town of Dillsboro, North Carolina. This town hit a rough spot during the economic recession of 2008 when a railroad that brought a lot of their business was pulled out of their town. They reached out to the local university, Western Carolina University, for help. Groups of professors and students then started working towards improving the town. They saw the importance of having a thriving

town because they knew a better town made their university even more appealing to potential students. They gathered data from surveys from the university students, faculty, and staff. Another survey was sent to visitors of the town and lastly, one was sent to business owners. From analyzing these surveys, they were able to make recommendations on how to restore economic prosperity to the town (pp. 32-48). The benefit to the town and the businesses in the town was they had a plan and a starting point on how to recover from the recession.

Importance of Marketing Plans

As reported in a study by Orphra Lotz and Lochner Marais (2007), marketing plans are necessary guidelines for businesses. Businesses which use marketing plans result in higher profits and use their resources effectively. The researchers did a study on the importance of marketing plans for manufacturing companies located in a North West province of South Africa. They stated many sources on the importance of marketing plans. One of which was a 1993 article by H. Goetsch (as cited by Lotz & Marais, 2007) which describes successful small businesses as, “Businesses that are marketing oriented and consumer focused and base their activities on an integrated marketing plan.” He continues to say, “An integrated marketing plan and not a business plan, forms the basis of the activities of a successful business” (p. 696).

According to Subir Bandyopadhyay (2016), only 50 percent of small businesses survive beyond their first years. This is in part due to their lack of a marketing plan. In addition to this, they often lack the money and resources of large firms to market effectively. However, marketing plans do not need to be expensive resources. Bandyopadhyay argues that a social media marketing plan can be free and effective. He also argues that successful marketing plans must have measurable goals (pp. 1-11).

Wu He, Feng-Kwei Wang, Yong Chen, and Shenghua Zha in 2015 published a study in which they interviewed 27 small businesses on their social media adoption. 20 of these businesses had adopted social media, mostly Facebook, to promote their businesses. The businesses that adopted Facebook had good feedback (pp. 152-154). He et al. reports, “The majority of these adaptors revealed that they gained more customers and revenue because of social media adoption.” (p.154). The researchers continue that some of these businesses adopted Facebook to attract new customers, while others kept with it to maintain their current customers (p. 154). Overall, He et al. concluded, “Social media provides businesses an opportunity to enhance brand awareness, increase sales, improve customer service, and implement marketing campaigns.” (p. 158). They also provided a list of suggestions for starting social media marketing. In agreement with Bandyopadhyay (2016), He et al. stated the importance of having metrics to measure success.

METHODOLOGY

Instrumentation

Two different questionnaire instruments were used in this study. The first questionnaire was sent to students that attend a semi-rural university. It was called “Escape Room and Game Library Student Survey” (Appendix A). There were three demographic questions. It had three yes or no questions to determine if they had been to the escape room and game library and what they did while there. There were four Likert scale questions on satisfaction. The questionnaire included three qualitative questions about suggestions for escape rooms regarding what games they should add, what would entice students to come, and how escape rooms can better market itself to college students. Lastly, there were four other questions, including preferred price range and preferred method to be contacted. It was distributed to the participants using Google Forms.

The second questionnaire was for existing escape room and game library customers. This questionnaire was named “Escape Room and Game Library Existing Customer Survey” (Appendix B). It had five demographic questions. There were four Likert scale questions on satisfaction. It had two qualitative questions about suggestions for escape rooms from existing customers on games they should add and how escape rooms can improve their marketing. Lastly, four other questions focused on preferred price range,

best method of contact, what would entice return, and what does one associate escape rooms with between the different products and services they offer. Again, it was distributed via Google Forms.

Participants

The “Escape Room Game and Library Student Questionnaire” was completed by one hundred ten students. Participation by students was entirely voluntary. Questionnaires were distributed to university/college classes, emailed to various student groups, and shared on Facebook. The “Escape Room and Game Library Existing Customer Questionnaire” was voluntarily completed by eighty-one people. The “Escape Room and Game Library” owner sent it to his email list. It is essential to mention that this particular escape room is only in its second year of operation.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), is a statistical software package that was used to analyze the data of both questionnaires. Descriptive statistical analysis was performed with the university questionnaire to analyze the results of the respondents. Descriptive statistics were used to compare individuals who had not been to the “Escape Room and Game Library,” and individuals who had been there and participated with the products and services they offer. The escape room target market at the university was also better determined through descriptive statistics. There was also a correlational analysis performed regarding overall satisfaction with escape rooms, games, and food and beverage variables.

Regarding the existing customer questionnaire, descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyze the data. Also, descriptive statistics were calculated to determine their current target market. Descriptive statistics were performed on the Likert scale items to determine satisfaction. Again, descriptive statistics were used to analyze price range, best method of contact, what would entice return, and what product or service people associate the “Escape Room and Game Library” with. Lastly, a qualitative question was analyzed to determine how the escape room’s current customers think that it could improve their marketing.

Results

The “Escape Room and Game Library” is a small business in a semi-rural town of Ohio. They offer escape rooms, which are rooms in which a group must work together to try to figure out puzzles to “escape” before time runs out. They also have over four hundred board games to play and a selection of food and beverages available to purchase. Overall, it is a very fun place to visit. However, it is not overly popular with the college students. This questionnaire is trying to assess four main goals. First, identify the target market of university students who know of and have participated in events at the “Escape Room and Game Library.” Second, identify what ways college students have heard about this escape room and the best ways to reach them in the future. Third, identify what would interest college students and entice them to come to this escape room. Lastly, assess how satisfied college students are with this particular escape room.

The “Escape Room and Game Library Student Questionnaire” is a reliable instrument ($r_c = .919$). (See Table 1). Of the one hundred ten participants that participated in the questionnaire, 59.1 percent were male, and 40.9 percent were female (Table 2, Figure 1). The breakdown of grades who took the questionnaire showed more upperclassmen (Table 3, Figure 2). There were 36 percent seniors that took the student questionnaire. This was the largest group among the students that took the questionnaire.

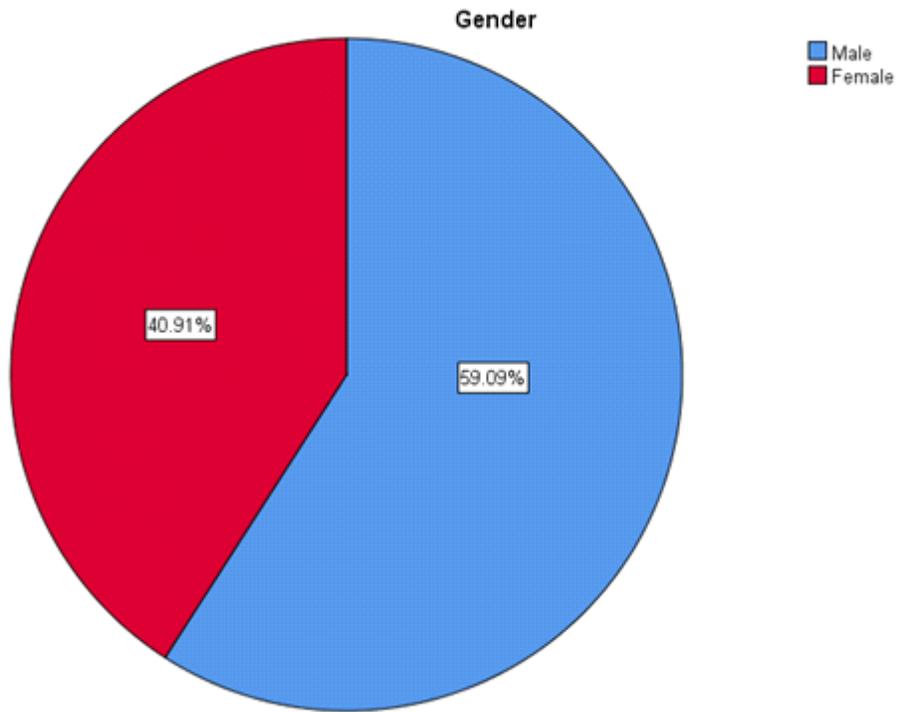
TABLE 1
RELIABILITY STATISTICS

Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items
.919	4

**TABLE 2
GENDER**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	65	59.1
	Female	45	40.9
	Total	110	100.0

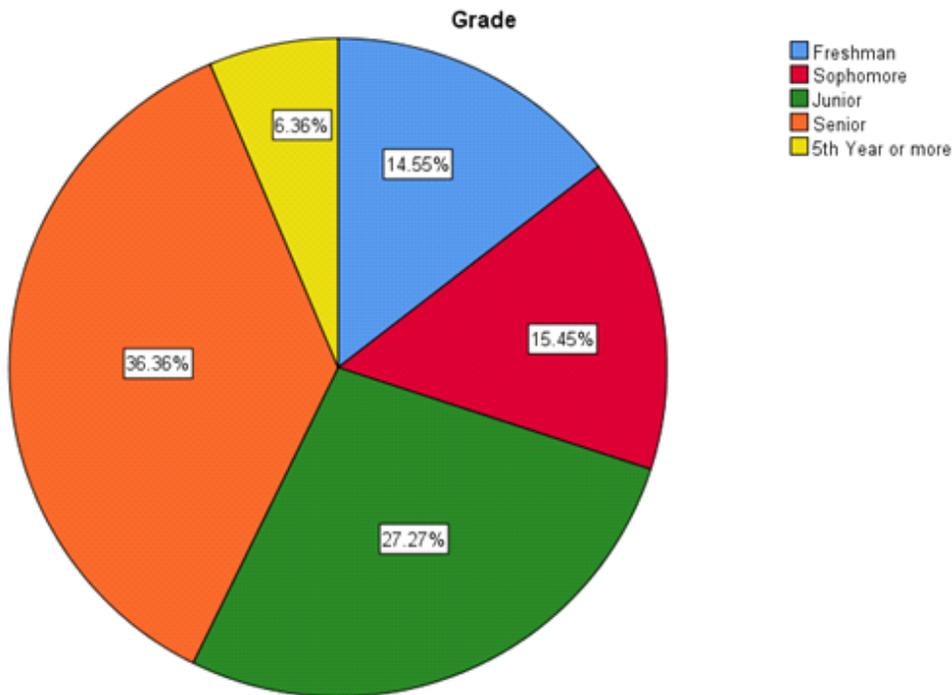
FIGURE 1



**TABLE 3
GRADE**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Freshman	16	14.5
	Sophomore	17	15.5
	Junior	30	27.3
	Senior	40	36.4
	5th Year or more	7	6.4
	Total	110	100.0

FIGURE 2



Goal 1: Identifying the Target Market of a Semi-Rural University

Goal one of the questionnaire was to better identify the target market of university/college students who know about the “Escape Room and Game Library” and those that have participated in events at this escape room. As shown in Table 4 only thirty- three of one hundred ten participants (30 percent) of those surveyed had been to this escape room. An item on the questionnaire also asked if the participants knew where the “Escape Room and Game Library” was located. There were 72.7 percent of respondents who did know where the escape room was located at (Table 5). In Table 6, it is shown that of the eighty people who knew where the “Escape Room and Game Library” was located, thirty-two (40%) people had been there. Sixty percent of college students who knew where it was have not gone to the escape room.

**TABLE 4
HAVE ATTENDED THE ESCAPE ROOM**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	33	30.0
	No	77	70.0
	Total	110	100.0

**TABLE 5
KNOWS WHERE THE ESCAPE ROOM IS LOCATED**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	80	72.7
	No	30	27.3
	Total	110	100.0

**TABLE 6
KNOWS WHERE THE ESCAPE ROOM IS AND HAS ATTENDED**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	32	40.0
	No	48	60.0
	Total	80	100.0

To further analyze the target market for this “Escape Room and Game Library” the respondents were broken down by gender. According to Table 7, of the sixty-five male students who took the questionnaire, only 21.5 percent of the male students have been to the escape room. According to Table 8 of the forty-five female students who took the questionnaire, 42.2 percent indicated that they have been to the escape room.

**TABLE 7
MALE STUDENTS THAT HAVE BEEN TO THE ESCAPE ROOM**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	14	21.5
	No	51	78.5
	Total	65	100.0

**TABLE 8
FEMALE STUDENTS THAT HAVE BEEN TO THE ESCAPE ROOM**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	19	42.2
	No	26	57.8
	Total	45	100.0

Gender can be further explored by looking at what percentage of each gender has participated in the escape rooms. According to Table 9, of the thirty-three students that indicated they have been to the escape room, twenty-three out of those thirty-three (70%) indicated they participated in the escape rooms. Second, according to Table 10, thirteen of the fourteen male students that indicated they had been to the escape room, participated in the escape rooms. Third, according to Table 11 only ten out of nineteen (52.6%) of the female students who went to the escape room, participated in the escape rooms.

**TABLE 9
STUDENTS THAT HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE ESCAPE ROOMS**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	23	20.9
	No	87	79.1
	Total	110	100.0

**TABLE 10
MALE STUDENTS THAT HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE ESCAPE ROOMS**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	13	20.0
	No	52	80.0
	Total	65	100.0

**TABLE 11
FEMALE STUDENTS THAT HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE ESCAPE ROOMS**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	10	22.2
	No	35	77.8
	Total	45	100.0

In addition to comparing genders it is also possible to compare underclassman, freshman and sophomores, to upperclassmen, junior, seniors, and fifth year students. According to Table 12, only 18.2 percent of the underclassmen who took the questionnaire, indicated that they have been to the escape room. Also, of the 18.2 percent of underclassmen students who had been to the escape room, according to Table 13 all but one student participated in the escape rooms. Also, according to Table 14, only 35.1 percent of the upperclassmen students who took the questionnaire, indicated they had been to the escape room. According to Table 15, eighteen of twenty-seven (67%) of upperclassmen who have been to the escape room, participated in the escape rooms. It can be determined that there have been more upperclassmen at the escape room because they have been on campus longer; however, this is not the case because the escape room has only been in business and in the area for only a little over a year.

**TABLE 12
UNDERCLASSMEN COLLEGE STUDENTS THAT HAVE BEEN TO THE ESCAPE ROOM**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	6	18.2
	No	27	81.8
	Total	33	100.0

**TABLE 13
UNDERCLASSMEN COLLEGE STUDENTS THAT HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE ESCAPE ROOMS**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	5	15.2
	No	28	84.8
	Total	33	100.0

**TABLE 14
UPPERCLASSMEN COLLEGE STUDENTS THAT HAVE BEEN TO THE ESCAPE ROOM**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	27	35.1
	No	50	64.9
	Total	77	100.0

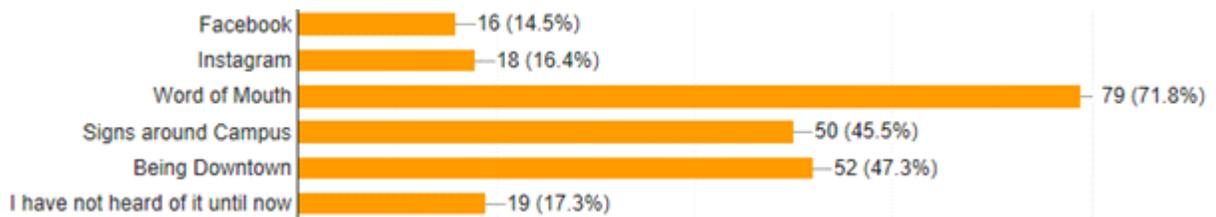
**TABLE 15
UPPERCLASSMEN COLLEGE STUDENTS THAT HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE ESCAPE ROOMS**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	18	23.4
	No	59	76.6
	Total	77	100.0

Goal 2: Identify What Ways University/College Students Had Heard about “The Escape Room and Game Library” and the Best Ways to Reach Them in the Future

Even though only 30 percent of the college students have been to the escape room, 72.73 percent knew where it was located (Table 5, Table 6). This means the escape room is doing something right because students have at least heard of them. In the questionnaire the respondents were asked to select all the ways they had heard of this escape room and had an option for them to add a different answer if necessary. The graphic in Figure 3 was copied from Google Forms. An overwhelming majority, 71.8 percent, heard about it by Word of Mouth, so it is nice to see that word is being spread about it (Figure 3). In conversations with the owner, the owner mentioned a lot of his business has grown from referrals, so that appears to be the same as far as college students are concerned. The next two most popular ways people had heard of the escape room were just being downtown and seeing it, 47.3 percent, and signs around campus 45.5 percent (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3
HOW HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS ESCAPE ROOM?**

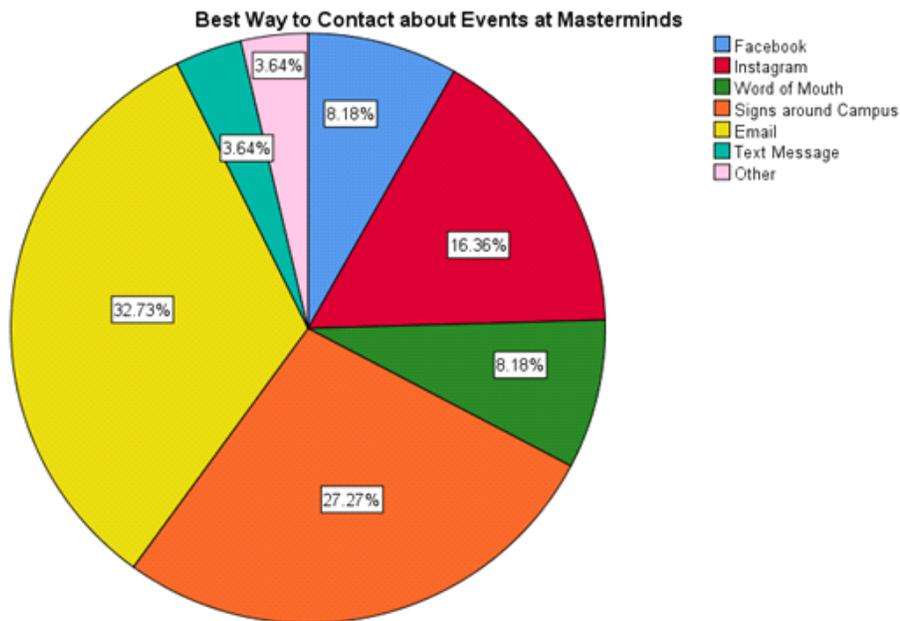


Item 14 asked about the best way to reach them about events at the escape room for college students. The results of this item are shown in Table 16 and Figure 4. Only 8.2 percent of respondents said that they would prefer to be informed by Word of Mouth (Table 16, Figure 4). There were 27.3 percent who said they would prefer to hear about events at the escape room from signs around campus (Table 16, Figure 4). In fact, signs around campus is the second largest percentage of the way people would like to hear about events behind emails. Emails are the largest with 32.7 percent (Table 16, Figure 4).

TABLE 16
BEST WAY TO CONTACT ABOUT EVENTS AT THE ESCAPE ROOM

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Facebook	9	8.2
	Instagram	18	16.4
	Word of Mouth	9	8.2
	Signs around Campus	30	27.3
	Email	36	32.7
	Text Message	4	3.6
	Other	4	3.6
	Total	110	100.0

FIGURE 4
BEST WAY TO CONTACT ABOUT EVENTS AT MASTERMINDS



Item 17 on the questionnaire did ask an open-ended question on how the escape room could further market itself to college students. There were 47.27 percent of respondents who had no suggestions. Another 12.7 percent said to put up flyers and use social media. Also, 7.27 percent suggested other promotional materials including radio advertisement, which is good to know because the owner has been considering using those. However, what was most encouraging was that 9 students, 8 percent, responded to host a monthly College Night, which is exactly what the escape room has been working on. Many of these students also suggested that these nights be themed.

Goal 3: Identify What Would Interest College Students to Come to the Escape Room

After having college students informed about the escape room, the next step to get them there is having activities that entice them to come. That was why the third goal of this questionnaire was to identify what would interest college students and entice them to come to the escape room. The first and most straightforward way this was analyzed was Item 12 on the questionnaire. It asked which of the choices of having Specific Nights for College Students, A New Escape Room, Tournament Style Game Night, or

Other would most entice them to visit Masterminds. There were 59.1 percent of respondents who answered that having a Specific Night for College Students would most entice them (Table 17). This paired with those who also wrote it as a better way for the escape room to market to college students means it is a method that they should employ.

**TABLE 17
WHAT WOULD ENTICE YOU TO VISIT THE ESCAPE ROOM?**

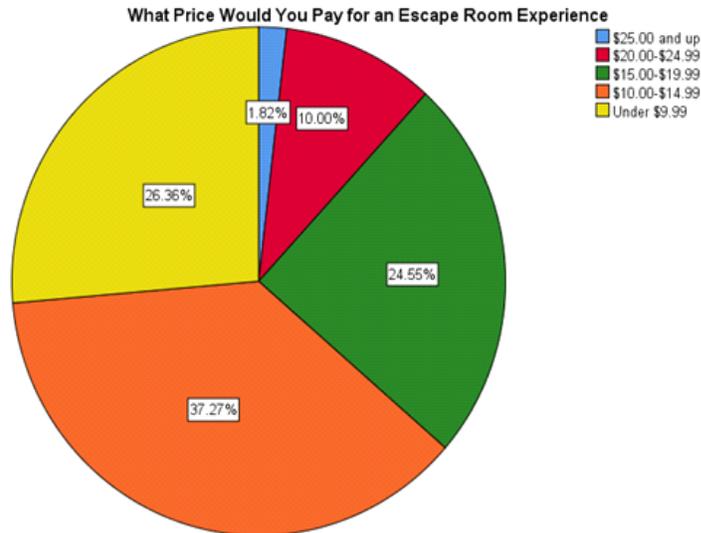
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Specific Nights for College Students	65	59.1
	A New Escape Room	17	15.5
	Tournament Style Game Night	23	20.9
	Other	5	4.5
	Total	110	100.0

Item 16 was an open-ended question asking, “What would entice you to come to college nights at the escape room?” There were 45.45 percent of respondents who answered discounts or free events. This was by far the most popular answer because the next most popular response was related to food and that was 13.6 percent of respondents. Since discounts or inexpensive prices are obviously important, it is necessary to look at what price college students are willing to pay. Item 13 asked what price they were willing to pay for an escape room experience. There were 63.7 percent of respondents who said that they would not pay above \$15.00 (Table 18, Figure 5). On college nights the price for an escape room was \$15.00, so the price was appropriate. It is important for students to realize that this is a discount from Masterminds’ student escape room price of \$23.00 and lower than their normal adult price of \$25.00.

**TABLE 18
WHAT PRICE WOULD YOU PAY FOR AN ESCAPE ROOM EXPERIENCE?**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	\$25.00 and up	2	1.8
	\$20.00-\$24.99	11	10.0
	\$15.00-\$19.99	27	24.5
	\$10.00-\$14.99	41	37.3
	Under \$9.99	29	26.4
	Total	110	100.0

FIGURE 5
WHAT PRICE WOULD YOU PAY FOR AN ESCAPE ROOM EXPERIENCE



Throughout the course of this project, the researcher was also planning and executing College Nights at the Escape Room. These were Tuesday nights where the facility was open just for college students to enjoy. There were three College Nights, one in September, October, and February. There is a final one planned for April. Details on the planning and the events are found in the “College Night Observation Tool” in Appendix C. Although, the attendance at these nights has not been satisfactory, there has been definite pros to having these events. First, it has deepened the relationship the escape room has with this university. The Student Life office is now aware of them from granting them permission pass out flyers about themselves in the student center, post on the portal, and to hang up posters. Also, there are now faculty who are aware of what the escape room is and can promote it to their students. Second, between tabling, social media posts, and having flyers around campus, students are more aware of what the escape room is. Hopefully, this is a relationship that can continue to improve.

There are many factors going right with trying to cater to and entice college students to come to this escape room. Having a college night is a great idea and having escape rooms which cost \$15.00 is also fantastic. Item 15 asked if there were any games or tournament ideas that college students would like to see. Most had no suggestion or suggested a game that the escape room already has. The largest suggestion gained from this is that a euchre tournament has the possibility of being popular.

Goal 4: Assess How Satisfied College Students Are With Escape Rooms

The last goal of the questionnaire was to assess how satisfied college students were with the escape room. To analyze this the results were filtered, so only those who indicated that they had been to the escape room in Item 5 were included in the analysis. This left 33 students, 30 percent of those who responded (Table 19). Item 8 asked how satisfied the respondents were with the escape room overall. Although, those who answered Item 5 with, “no, I have not been there” were filtered out of this analysis, two respondents answered Item 5 that they had been to the escape room and then Item 11 that they had never been there. If one excludes these two responses, 100 percent of those students who had been there were satisfied or extremely satisfied with their experience (Table 19).

**TABLE 19
OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE ESCAPE ROOM**

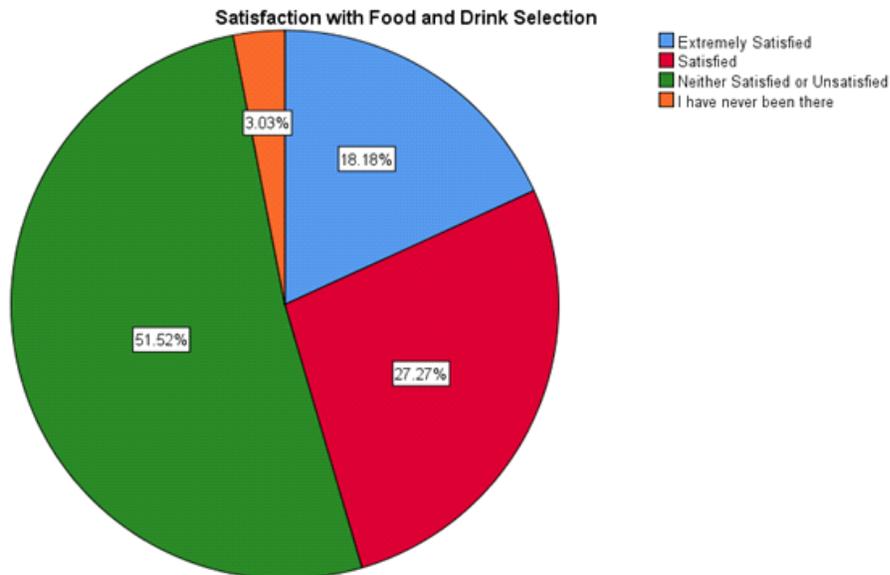
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Extremely Satisfied	17	51.5	51.5
	Satisfied	14	42.4	93.9
	I have never been there	2	6.1	100.0
	Total	33	100.0	

The escape room does offer a selection of food and drinks, and one item asked about the satisfaction people have with it. Only 45.5 percent of students who have been there say that they are satisfied or extremely satisfied with the food and drink selection (Table 20, Figure 6). The data for this questionnaire was collected prior to the escape room updating their menu, which was done at the beginning of December 2018.

**TABLE 20
SATISFACTION WITH FOOD AND DRINK SELECTION**

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Extremely Satisfied	6	18.2	18.2
	Satisfied	9	27.3	45.5
	Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied	17	51.5	97.0
	I have never been there	1	3.0	100.0
	Total	33	100.0	

**FIGURE 6
SATISFACTION WITH FOOD AND DRINK SELECTION**



According to Table 21 there is a strong relationship between satisfaction with escape rooms, games, and food and drink regarding overall satisfaction with the escape room ($r = .678, .876, .948$ consecutively). Furthermore, according to Tables 23 and 24 the games and food and drink are considered to be major factors

regarding overall satisfaction of the escape room (R – Square = .767, .899 consecutively). According to Table 25, the escape rooms are moderate factors regarding overall satisfaction.

**TABLE 21
CORRELATIONS**

		Overall Satisfied	Food and Drink	Games	Escape Rooms
Overall Satisfied	Pearson Correlation	1	.948**	.876**	.678**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	110	110	110	110
Food and Drink Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.948**	1	.838**	.645**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	110	110	110	110
Board Game Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.876**	.838**	1	.501**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	110	110	110	110
Escape Rooms Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.678**	.645**	.501**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	110	110	110	110

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**TABLE 22
MODEL SUMMARY GAMES**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.876 ^a	.767	.765	1.020

- Predictors: (Constant), Games

**TABLE 23
MODEL SUMMARY FOOD AND DRINK**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.948 ^a	.899	.898	.670

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Food and Drink

**TABLE 24
MODEL SUMMARY ESCAPE ROOMS**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.678 ^a	.459	.454	1.552

- Predictors: (Constant), Escape Rooms

Overall, this escape room is doing well on how satisfied students are with them. One hundred percent said that they are satisfied or extremely satisfied. Only 45.5 percent said that they are satisfied or extremely satisfied with the selection of food and beverages. However, the escape room has already made steps towards raising that proportion. The main problem is not about people's satisfaction, it is finding ways to entice them to come through the door.

Existing Customer Questionnaire Results

Introduction

The Escape Room and Game Library has been around for a little over a year, so they already have customers. The goals of this questionnaire involved finding out about their current customers and what they enjoy about the escape room. The first goal was to determine the escape room's current target market. Goal number two was to assess how satisfied current customers are with Masterminds. Lastly, the goal was to identify what would interest their current customers to come back to the escape room and the best ways to inform them of new things that were happening.

Goal 1: Determine the Escape Room's Current Target Market

Eighty-one current customers participated in the Escape Room and Game Library Existing Customer Questionnaire. Of those 81 participants, 22 were male and 59 were female (Table 25). This is a limitation of the data because so many of the participants were female. The owner has observed the clientele of the escape room being split more evenly along gender lines. Most participants were from the age group 18-29 (Table 26). There were very few responses from people over the age of 50, showing that the current customers of the escape room are young people and more than likely families, whose children still live in the house.

TABLE 25
GENDER

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	22	27.2
	Female	59	72.8
	Total	81	100.0

TABLE 26
AGE

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	18-29	55	67.9
	30-39	10	12.3
	40-49	12	14.8
	50-59	3	3.7
	70 and Up	1	1.2
	Total	81	100.0

Goal 2: Determine Satisfaction Level of Existing Customers

Existing customers of the escape room are very satisfied. Item 6 asked what existing customers overall satisfaction was with the escape room. There were 97.5 percent of existing customers who were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the escape room (Table 27).

**TABLE 27
OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE ESCAPE ROOM**

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Extremely Satisfied	56	69.1	69.1
	Satisfied	23	28.4	97.5
	Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied	2	2.5	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	

Items 7, 8, and 9 asked about the satisfaction levels of different aspects of the escape room. According to Table 28, 54.3 percent of existing customers are satisfied or extremely satisfied with the food and drink selection at the escape room.

**TABLE 28
FOOD AND DRINK SATISFACTION**

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Extremely Satisfied	12	14.8	14.8
	Satisfied	32	39.5	54.3
	Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied	33	40.7	95.1
	Unsatisfied	4	4.9	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	

According to Table 29, 86.4 percent of people were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the selection of games at the escape room. No one answered that they were unsatisfied. However, 11.1 percent did report they had been there, but did not play games.

**TABLE 29
GAME SATISFACTION**

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Extremely Satisfied	51	63.0	63.0
	Satisfied	19	23.5	86.4
	Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied	2	2.5	88.9
	I have been there, but have never played board games	9	11.1	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	

Lastly, Table 30 reports that 64.2 percent of existing customers are satisfied or extremely satisfied with the escape rooms. Once again, no one was unsatisfied. However, 33.3 percent reported they had not participated in an escape room.

**TABLE 30
ESCAPE ROOM SATISFACTION**

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Extremely Satisfied	38	46.9	46.9
	Satisfied	14	17.3	64.2
	Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied	2	2.5	66.7
	I have been there, but never done an escape room	27	33.3	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	

Goal 3: Identify What Would Interest Current Customers to Come Back and the Best Ways to Inform Them of New Things That Are Happening

**TABLE 31
WHAT ENTICES PEOPLE TO RETURN TO AN ESCAPE ROOM**

According to Table 31, 63% of the participants indicated a new escape room would interest and entice them to come back. This was the number one reason in ranking. The second most reason people would come back is if there was a tournament style game night. 27.2% of the participants indicated that.

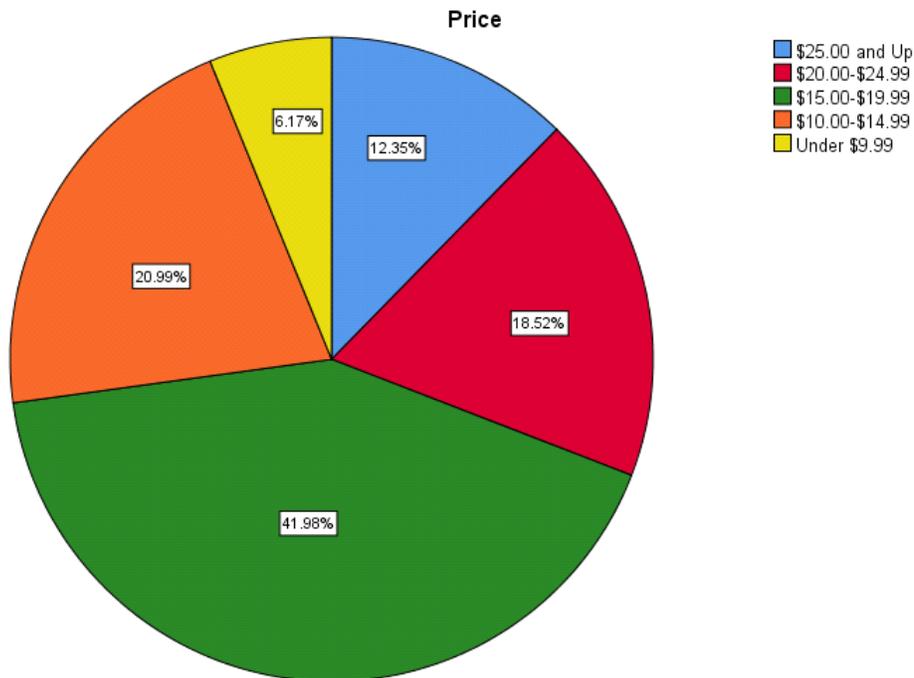
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	A New Escape Room	51	63.0
	Tournament Style Game Night	22	27.2
	More Hours	2	2.5
	Nothing, it is great the way it is	2	2.5
	Other	4	4.9
	Total	81	100.0

Since escape rooms are the main reason current customers return to an escape room, it is necessary to look at how much people are willing to spend on them. Item 12 of the questionnaire focused on this. The most popular answer (42 percent of respondents) was \$15.00 to \$19.99 (Table 32, Figure 7). This is higher than the college student questionnaire where the majority stated they would be willing to pay \$10.00 to \$14.99. Since, many of the people who responded to the College Student Questionnaire had never been to an escape room, it is possible to surmise that once people completed an escape room they realize how much fun they are and may be willing to pay more. Since the current escape room price for this company is \$25.00 it is important to note that only 12 percent of respondents say they were willing to pay \$25.00 or higher (Table 32, Figure 7).

**TABLE 32
PRICE**

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	\$25.00 and Up	10	12.3	12.3
	\$20.00-\$24.99	15	18.5	30.9
	\$15.00-\$19.99	34	42.0	72.8
	\$10.00-\$14.99	17	21.0	93.8
	Under \$9.99	5	6.2	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	

**FIGURE 7
PRICE**

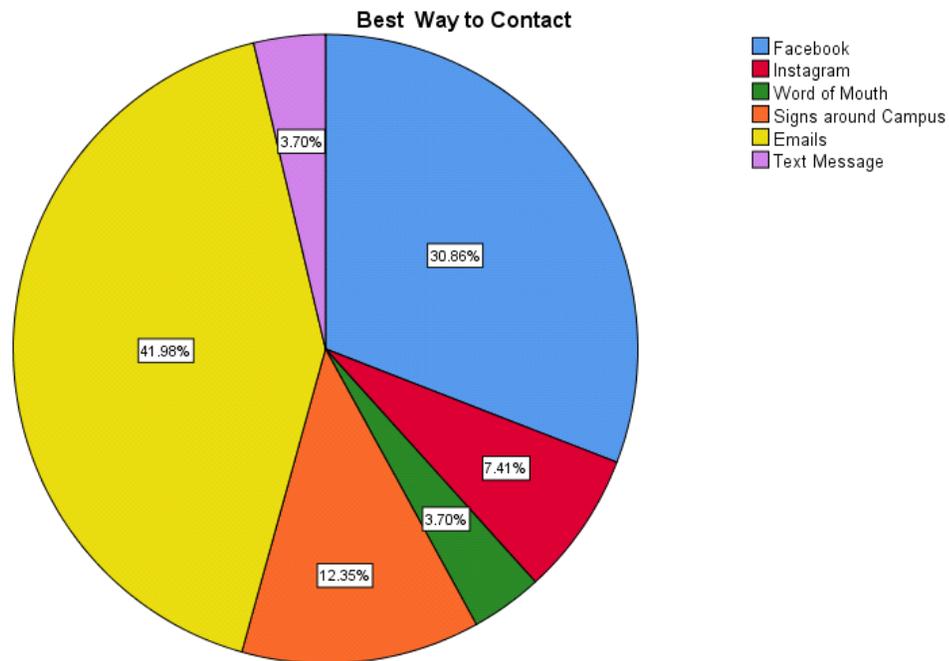


Lastly, it is necessary to learn how existing customers want to be informed about events happening at an escape room, whether it is a College Night, a new escape room, or a different kind of mixer night. Item 13 asked this question in the questionnaire. Forty two percent of current customers say the best way to contact them is through email, followed by 30.9 percent saying Facebook (Table 33, Figure 8).

**TABLE 33
BEST WAY TO CONTACT**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Facebook	25	30.9
	Instagram	6	7.4
	Word of Mouth	3	3.7
	Signs around Campus	10	12.3
	Emails	34	42.0
	Text Message	3	3.7
	Total	81	100.0

**FIGURE 8
BEST WAY TO CONTACT**

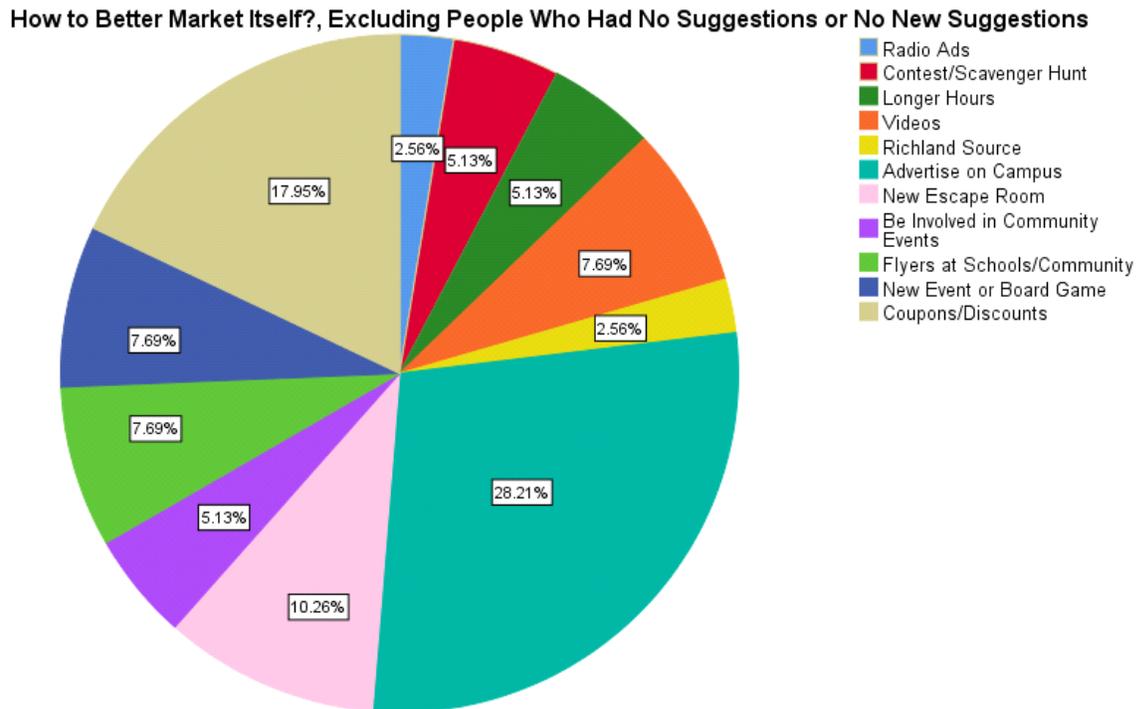


Lastly, there was a qualitative question that asked about how an escape room can better market itself. Table 34 and Figure 9 show these responses grouped by type of response. Those that had no suggestions and those that offered no new suggestions to what an escape room is already doing were removed from the group. The most popular answer was to market on campus, with 28.2 percent. Next was coupons and discounts with 17.9 percent. Then a new escape room with 10.3 percent, so once again reinforcing that a new escape room was a good plan.

TABLE 34
HOW TO BETTER MARKET ITSELF?, EXCLUDING PEOPLE WHO HAD NO SUGGESTIONS OR NO NEW SUGGESTIONS

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Radio Ads	1	2.6
	Contest/Scavenger Hunt	2	5.1
	Longer Hours	2	5.1
	Videos	3	7.7
	Richland Source	1	2.6
	Advertise on Campus	11	28.2
	New Escape Room	4	10.3
	Be Involved in Community Events	2	5.1
	Flyers at Schools/Community	3	7.7
	New Event or Board Game	3	7.7
	Coupons/Discounts	7	17.9
	Total	39	100.0

FIGURE 9
HOW TO BETTER MARKET ITSELF? EXCLUDING PEOPLE WHO HAD NO SUGGESTIONS OR NO NEW SUGGESTIONS



DISCUSSION

The research questions explored in this project were; (1) What is the impact that experiential learning has on small businesses? (2) What is the impact and benefits of universities working with small businesses?

Referring to the first research question, the researcher performed many tasks. The researcher first worked with an escape room company/business to develop questionnaires. These questionnaires were able to give this escape room company/business a good idea of where they were with their current target market, strategies, and customer satisfaction. The questionnaires were sent to both existing customers and current college-aged students. This particular escape room's goal was to recruit more college-aged students to their facility. To accomplish this, College Nights were planned and executed. These were held on Tuesday nights. Since there were only eleven students that responded to the College Night Questionnaire, the researcher felt it was not necessary to report those results. This escape room company was opened just for college students to play games and complete the escape room at a discounted rate.

It is important to mention that a major finding from the university student questionnaire, was that a majority of college students that have attended and participated in the escape rooms were upperclassmen. As a result, this data is imperative for this escape room company to understand that they are connecting with the upperclassmen, however not the underclassmen college students. The results also indicated that they need to develop marketing strategies to get underclassmen more aware of their escape rooms. Since determining and broadening the target market is one of this escape room company's major goals, this information can be better used within a marketing plan. Another one of the functions the researcher has been involved with is helping this escape room company develop a marketing plan to achieve their desired goals and give them an idea of the direction they are heading and improvements that need to be made.

For the second research question, regarding the impact and benefits of universities working with small businesses, results from the questionnaires were analyzed. Some of the major findings from the university student questionnaire included discovering ways students were hearing about escape rooms. The primary way was from word of mouth. This meant that this particular escape room company needed to have more college students come through their doors, so that those college students could refer other students to attend and participate in games, activities, and their escape rooms. It was also found that to inform college-aged students about events, it was crucial that emails were sent out, but also going "old school" with paper flyers could be effective. Furthermore, since social media is easy, it was still a good idea to put a post on several media outlets. Second, this escape room company was doing many things well when it came to advertising to college students to come through their doors. College Nights had the potential to be very well received and the escape rooms were priced according to students' responses regarding pricing for college student nights. According to students, the escape room's fifteen dollar price was appropriate.

The college students who came to the escape room were satisfied with their experience. According to the satisfaction results, one hundred percent of the students indicated they were satisfied with their experience. There was a strong relationship between the satisfaction with escape rooms, games, and food and drink and overall satisfaction with the escape room company itself. Also, if students went to the escape room company, they were most likely to have participated in the escape rooms.

Another finding regarding research question two was that there were more upperclassman than underclassman students who visited and participated in the escape rooms. Furthermore, there were not any major differences regarding the responses between the genders regarding satisfaction.

The existing customer questionnaire also provided some valuable findings and results. Again, similar to the students' results, once a customer came to the escape room, they indicated they were satisfied with their experience. As a major result for this particular escape room company, the overall customer satisfaction for existing customers was ninety seven percent.

This escape room company is known by existing customers for both their escape rooms and board games. The issue was recruiting people in and having them participate, specifically in the escape rooms. Of the existing customers who responded, thirty three percent had been to the escape rooms, but never participated in an escape room. However, sixty three percent of customers said they would return with the addition of a new escape room and twenty-seven percent mention a tournament game night. Last, it was found that the best ways to let customers know of events and news, such as a new escape room, was through emails followed by Facebook.

CONCLUSION

Limitations

The researcher has a number of recommendations for further exploration regarding this project. One of the limitations of this project was the imbalance of male and female students who took the survey. Next time this study or project is conducted, it is recommended to distribute the surveys evenly among male and female students. Another limitation was the low number of existing customers who took the survey. A possible solution to this would be for this escape room company to expand their target market and existing customers. Third, within the University Student Questionnaire there were more responses from the College of Business than any other academic college. It would be interesting to have those numbers be the same, so it could be found if there was any correlation between Academic College and the likelihood to go and be satisfied with the escape room's facility.

Furthermore, if the questionnaires were used again some changes would need to be made. On the University Student Questionnaire, Item Four, email was not listed as an option of how one had previously heard of this escape room company. Since many emails were sent inviting people to College Nights it would have been beneficial to see how many people heard of it from that source. Also, on the University Student Questionnaire the question should have been asked, "Have you participated in playing board games, yes or no?"

Future Recommendations

Regarding the marketing strategies to their existing customers and gaining customers from the students at the university, keeping up with sending emails is imperative. It is also imperative to utilize the posting of flyers at the university. Existing customers also enjoy being informed of events on Facebook. Many customers also have heard of this particular escape room company through word of mouth, so starting a referral program could be beneficial and effective. Last, the owner of this escape room company is encouraged to promote and present their business to college-aged students to nearby universities.

Continuing with marketing strategies, this escape room company should continue to utilize a marketing plan. This document will keep them on track by organizing their goals and keeping track of them numerically on the gap dashboard. The purpose of a gap dashboard within a marketing plan is to evaluate data and performance over time. It also will provide space to define their target market, core strategies, innovations, and marketing materials. It is also a place where they can work on what their remarkable difference is. Their remarkable difference is the reason that a person would choose this particular escape room company over another escape room companies or activity.

College Nights have potential to be successful. Fifty nine percent of respondents to the university survey said that a night for just college students would entice them to come. Nonetheless, the events that have been held have not been very successful. It would be interesting to try a different night of the week and see if it is just a timing problem. Overall, this escape room company needs to continue to maintain a relationship with the university. The university has new students coming in every year who all have the potential to be new and loyal customers.

REFERENCES

- Bandyopadhyay, S. (2016). How a cost-effective social media plan can make a difference for small businesses. *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences*, 19, 1–12.
- Grunwell, S., & Ha, I. (2014). How to revitalize a small rural town? An empirical study of factors for success. University-community collaboration with a small historic rural tourism town. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 9(2), 32–50.
- He, W., Wang, F., Chen, Y., & Zha, S. (2015). An exploratory investigation of social media adoption by small businesses. *Information Technology and Management*, 18(2), 149–160.
doi:10.1007/s10799-015-0243-3

- Humphrey, K. (2017). The application of a serious, non-digital escape game learning experience in higher education. *Sport & Exercise Psychology Review*, 13(2), 48–54.
- Kumcu, E., & Kumcu, A. (1998). Undergraduate student consulting in export marketing: An experiential course in electronic resource use. *Marketing Education Review*, 8(1), 59–70.
doi:10.1080/10528008.1998.11488621
- Lotz, O., & Marais, L. (2007). Manufacturing enterprises and marketing planning in a mining area of the North West Province, South Africa: Lessons for local business support centres. *Development Southern Africa*, 24(5), 693–706.
- Munoz, L., Miller, R., Poole, S.M. (2016). Professional student organizations and experiential learning activities: What drives student intentions to participate? *Journal of Education for Business*, 91(1), 45–51.
- Nicholson, S. (2015). *Peeking behind the locked door: A survey of escape room facilities*. Retrieved from <http://scottnicholson.com/pubs/erfacwhite.pdf>
- Rouse, W. (2017). Lessons learned while escaping from a Zombie: Designing a Breakout EDU Game. *History Teacher*, 50(4), 553–564.
- Swan, J.E., & Hansen, S.W. (1996). CAPS-Client adaptive problem solving: Experiential team learning. *Marketing Education Review*, 6(2), 33–44.
- Wu, C., Wagenschutz, H., & Hein, J. (2018). Promoting leadership and teamwork development through Escape Rooms. *Medical Education*, 52(5), 561–562.

APPENDIX 1: UNIVERSITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Escape Room and Game Library Student Questionnaire

- 1) What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
- 2) What grade/year are you?
 - Freshman
 - Sophomore
 - Junior
 - Senior
 - 5th Year or More
- 3) Which academic college are you in?
 - College of Business and Economics
 - College of Nursing and Health Sciences
 - College of Arts and Sciences
 - College of Education
 - Undecided
- 4) Do you know where the Escape Room and Game Library is located?
 - Yes
 - No
- 5) Have you ever been to the Escape Room and Game Library?
 - Yes
 - No
- 6) Have you ever participated in the escape rooms at the Escape Room and Game Library?
 - Yes
 - No
- 7) How have you heard about the Escape Room and Game Library? Select all that apply.
 - Facebook
 - Instagram

- Word of Mouth
- Signs around Campus
- Being Downtown
- I have not heard of it until now
- Other

If other is selected please specify: _____

8) If you have been to the Escape Room and Game Library how satisfied were you with the experience?

- Extremely Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Extremely Unsatisfied
- I have never been there

9) How satisfied were you with the selection of food and drinks at the Escape Room and Game Library?

- Extremely Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Extremely Unsatisfied
- I have never been there

10) How satisfied were you with the selection of games at the Escape Room and Game Library?

- Extremely Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Extremely Unsatisfied
- I have never been there
- I have been there, but have never played board games

11) How satisfied were you with the escape rooms at the Escape Room and Game Library?

- Extremely Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Extremely Unsatisfied
- I have never been there
- I have been there, but have never done an escape room

12) Which of the following would be most likely to entice you come to the Escape Room and Game Library?

- Specific nights for College Students
- A new escape room
- Tournament style game night
- Other

If other is selected please specify: _____

13) What is the price range you would be willing to pay for an escape room experience?

- \$25.00 and up
- \$20.00-\$24.99
- \$15.00-\$19.99

- \$10.00-\$14.99
 - Under \$9.99
- 14) What would be the best way to reach you about events happening at the Escape Room and Game Library?
- Facebook
 - Instagram
 - Word of Mouth
 - Signs around Campus
 - Email
 - Text Message
 - Other
- If other please specify: _____
- 15) Are there any specific games or game tournaments that you would love to see this Escape Room and Game Library company implement?
- 16) What would entice you to come to college nights at the university?
- 17) Any further suggestions on how this Escape Room and Game Library can better market itself and cater to college students?

Thank you for taking the time to take this survey! All responses will remain confidential.

APPENDIX 2: EXISTING CUSTOMER QUESTIONNAIRE

Escape Room and Game Library Existing Customer Survey

- 1) What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
- 2) What is your age?
 - 70 and up
 - 60-69
 - 50-59
 - 40-49
 - 30-39
 - 18-29
- 3) What is your ethnicity?
 - White
 - Black or African American
 - American Indian
 - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - Hispanic
 - Latino/Latina
 - Asian
 - Bi-racial
 - Multi-racial
- 4) What is your household income?
 - \$200,000 or more
 - \$150,000 to \$199,999
 - \$100,000 to \$149,999
 - \$75,000 to \$99,999

- \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - \$35,000 to \$49,999
 - \$25,000 to \$34,999.
 - Less than \$25,000.
- 5) What Ohio County are you from?
- Ashland
 - Lorain
 - Medina
 - Wayne
 - Holmes
 - Knox
 - Richland
 - Huron
 - Out of State
 - Other
- If other is selected please specify: _____
- 6) How satisfied were you with the experience at the Escape Room and Game Library?
- Extremely Satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied
 - Unsatisfied
 - Extremely Unsatisfied
- 7) How satisfied were you with the selection of food and drinks at the Escape Room and Game Library?
- Extremely Satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied
 - Unsatisfied
 - Extremely Unsatisfied
- 8) How satisfied were you with the selection of games at the Escape Room and Game Library?
- Extremely Satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied
 - Unsatisfied
 - Extremely Unsatisfied
 - I have been there, but have never played board games
- 9) How satisfied were you with the escape rooms at the Escape Room and Game Library?
- Extremely Satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied
 - Unsatisfied
 - Extremely Unsatisfied
 - I have been there, but have never done an escape room
- 10) What do you most associate the Escape Room and Game Library with?
- Escape Rooms
 - Board Games
 - Team Bonding
 - Other
- If other is selected please specify: _____

- 11) Which of the following would be most likely to entice you to return this Escape Room and Game Library?
- A new escape room
 - Tournament style game night
 - Other
- If other is selected please specify: _____
- 12) What is the price range you would be willing to pay for an escape room experience?
- \$25.00 and up
 - \$20.00-\$24.99
 - \$15.00-\$19.99
 - \$10.00-\$14.99
 - Under \$9.99
- 13) What would be the best way to reach you about events happening at this Escape Room and Game Library?
- Facebook
 - Instagram
 - Word of Mouth
 - Signs around Campus
 - Email
 - Text Message
 - Other
- If other please specify: _____
- 14) Are there any specific games or game tournaments that you would love to see this Escape Room and Game Library company implement?
- 15) Any further suggestions on how this Escape Room and Game Library can better market itself and cater to college students?

Thank you for taking the time to take this survey! All responses will remain confidential.