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Paint-Your-Own Pottery Case Study

Lisa Morin

There are currently more than seventy paint-your-own pottery shops in the United States. Although the concept of such studios is fairly new to New England, they have been in existence on the West Coast for years.

Isabelle and Madeline were best friends who met in college. They had not seen each other in months and decided to meet one Saturday, halfway between their homes in Avon and Moodus, Connecticut. After a big hug, Isabelle and Madeline walked into Amazing Glaze on a cool, crisp spring day. Isabelle had been to Color Me Mine, a paint-your-own-pottery studio in California and was sure that Madeline would love the experience of coloring and firing a clay piece that had already been formed by a pottery professional.

It was both their first time to Amazing Glaze. The atmosphere was comfortable and casual, so they could catch up on each other's busy lives, as they became involved in their artistry. Both young women were charged with energy because they knew they would have a beautiful pottery piece at a reasonable cost to take home and remember for years to come.

Background

Paint-your-own-pottery studios are still fairly new to the East Coast. Yet, they have been in development on the West Coast for years. Color-Me-Mine, a 1996 Los Angeles-acquired division of Koo Koo Roo California Kitchen, was purchased to combine the pottery and food industries for the company. The basic concept that people would get thirsty and hungry when spending over two hours doing pottery painting, increased the sales in their neighboring café by 13 percent in the days after the pottery studio opened. The owner sees the studio as "a form of relaxation, a you-deserve-a-break-today kind of thing."¹

There are currently more than seventy such pottery shops in various locations in the country. Petroglyph, located in Santa Cruz, California, likes

to call itself a "pottery bar." At Petroglyph, the process a customer follows to complete a piece of pottery is similar to that followed at other studios. The first step is for the consumer to choose a mug, plate, pasta bowl, frame, or other piece of already molded and once-fired piece of pottery from the kiln. Next, the customer picks as many beautiful rainbow color paints as he wants and starts painting on the pottery's surface.

Once the crafter is finished with his masterpiece, he passes it on to a staff member. The studio will then give it a final firing. The customer's finished piece will be ready for pick up within a week.

Forbes recently described pottery shops as: "Self-expression for the time-deprived, made fast and simple! You get the feeling of creation without most of the agonies and study that true creativity exacts."² "One of Petroglyph's coowners commented. "It's fast and it's useful. No matter how badly you paint a bowl, you can still have cereal in it. It caters to that desire of not having to commit."³

Roll Out into the New England Market

In addition to Amazing Glaze, there are numerous paint-your-own-pottery studios entering other New England urban markets. The idea for Amazing Glaze came to Renee, one of the coowners, after she visited her sister in California. She came across Color-Me-Mine and was positive it could be a successful venture in Connecticut, her home state. Renee and a close friend left their corporate jobs and formed Amazing Glaze, a limited liability corporation. They renovated an old house that was previously a doctor's office in downtown Avon. Their hope for the future is to have picnic tables out front and beverages and snacks available for their customers.⁴

Come Out & Clay is located on a main street in South Norwalk, Connecticut. The studio's success can be measured by the fact that they recently opened a shop in Mamaroneck, New York, and one a short distance down the road from Amazing Glaze in West Hartford,

Connecticut. The owners are contemplating opening another studio in Stamford, Connecticut. Growth of the marketplace is positive for the industry, but competition for these small studios has the potential to make success impossible if they do not have customer loyalty to their studio.

What Does It Cost?

Isabelle and Madeline enjoyed the experience and announced to each other their creations were "wonderful" even with a distinct lack of special artistic ability. Both heartily agreed that the cost was worth it to know they had personalized their pottery in a way impossible to do with regular store pottery. In addition, the women had enjoyed a comfortable, relaxing, and enjoyable visit with each other.

Isabelle paid \$29.95 for a large pasta bowl; she had decided to sponge a beautiful sunflower in the center with bright blue speckles on the reverse side. To this day, she loves to show off her piece and her name in large bold letters on the bottom of the bowl along with the month and year. Madeline's medium fruit bowl was \$27.95. She opted to sponge the bowl completely with pastel purple, blue, and green. It is perfect for fresh fruit on her kitchen table.⁵

On average, the cost of painting is about \$8 per hour, prorated every fifteen minutes. The

minimum charge is one hour. The unpainted ceramic pieces range in price from a \$3 tile piece to \$40 for a large vase. In addition, there is a \$3 firing fee at some studios.

The Situation

Paint-your-own-pottery studios are in the introductory/early growth stage of the marketing product life cycle. Yet for success truly to be achieved by each studio, this concept needs strong awareness advertising to educate and motivate consumers to try their hands at personalizing a pottery piece. Presently, most studios have printed flyers within the stores for birthday parties, corporate motivational parties, bachelorette parties, and couples' showers. Still, many individuals have no idea that this concept exists and some who do know seem resistant to "risking" a \$30 pottery piece to their own artistic interpretations. At the time of this case study, the owners of Amazing Graze were still below breakeven and were worried about the studio's financial future.

Teaching notes are available for faculty who request them through the New England Journal of Entrepreneurship's editorial staff.

Endnotes

1. Internet, Pointcast Network; www.entrepreneurmag.com.
2. Joshua Levine, "Somewhat Individual," *Forbes*, March 11, 1996, p. 152.
3. Ibid.
4. Amazing Glaze store visit, April 26, 1997.
5. Ibid.
6. Come Out & Clay pamphlet.

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Lisa Morin is a graduate of Sacred Heart University's MBA program. This case study was written by her in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced marketing course. Ms. Morin's submission was considered one of the best in the class and speaks to some of the challenges and risks in new business, entrepreneurial start-ups.