



Lake Mills Business Owner Survey Results

In order to better understand the conditions and concerns of business owners in downtown Lake Mills, a survey was conducted to collect comprehensive business information about needs and opportunities, business and workforce data, and market and marketing data. 85 surveys were sent out and 48 were returned and tabulated. The following section provides a summary of the responses collected.



Lake Mills' Historic Library

Needs and Opportunities Assessment

This portion of the report identifies the challenges and needs of downtown businesses, as well as the Main Street tools that are most beneficial to business owners. The survey also attempts to gain insight into the qualities of the downtown business climate and location.

- Respondents found the main business challenges to be:
 - Out-of-town competition (64%)
 - In-town competition (46%)
 - Expensive or unavailable utilities (39%)
 - Expensive employee wages and benefits (37%)
 - Difficulty in recruiting and retaining employees (35%)
 - Insufficient Parking (35%)

- Respondents felt the need for information or assistance with:
 - Advertising and marketing (48%)
 - Financial management (40%)
 - Customer service and hospitality (38%)
 - Internet and e-commerce (37%)
 - Business market analysis (36%)
 - Building improvements (34%)
 - Window display design and interior design (31%)

- Surveyed business owners found all of the existing Main Street products and services useful. Below is the response rate for *very useful or useful*:
 - Information sharing (48%)
 - Analysis and reporting of Downtown market and economy (44%)
 - Web site and internet resources (44%)
 - Cooperative advertising coordination (42%)
 - Special event coordination (39%)
 - Retail event coordination (34%)
 - Free design assistance (31%)
 - Free business assistance (21%)

- Surveyed business owners felt the following proposed Main Street products would be useful:
 - Very Useful*
 - Downtown public improvement projects
 - Advertising Main Street as a shopping destination
 - Signage matching grant
 - Useful*
 - Low interest building improvement loans
 - Low interest business loans
 - Façade matching grant
 - Group business training

- When asked if they have used, or will use, historic preservation tax credits, SBDC assistance, SCORE counseling, or COMMERCE assistance, the overwhelming majority of respondents said they are not sure, or they would not.

- In relation to the business climate, a majority of the respondents agreed with the following statements:
 - Local police protection is outstanding
 - I feel safe downtown; even at night
 - Local fire protection is outstanding
 - Local waste management is outstanding
 - I always try to buy products and services locally
 - I always direct customers to other Downtown businesses
 - I seek ways to cooperate with complementary downtown businesses
 - My building façade draws customers to my business
 - My business is open when customers want to shop
 - Employees of my business show great customer service
 - Downtown Lake Mills is an excellent place to have a business

Fewer, but still many, respondents agreed with:

- The municipal services are worth the level of taxation
 - The existing downtown business mix helps my business
 - The look and feel of downtown helps my business
 - My window and store displays help my business
 - My advertising helps my business
- Approximately 88% of respondents reported they are very satisfied or satisfied with the present location of their business.
 - 35 percent of respondents reported they plan to expand business operation in downtown Lake Mills. Likewise, 33 percent said they, or the building owner, are considering building improvement projects.

Business Characteristics

Information gathered in this section of the survey focuses on tenancy, duration of ownership, parking availability and general workforce information.

- 46 percent of respondents have operated their business for more than 20 years, and, 58 percent have owned their business for more than 11 years.
- More than half of respondents currently own the space their business is located in.
- The vast majority of respondents claim their customers utilize street parking within one-half block of the business entrance.
- The vast majority of respondents claim their employees utilize a designated employee parking lot.
- When asked about the balance between adequate hours of operation and profits, the majority of respondents said they are open all the hours they can be. But, approximately 19% said they would be open more if they could guarantee sales.

Market and Marketing Data

The purpose of this portion of the survey is to collect data regarding store hours, busiest shopping times, sources of advertising, competitive advantages, and target markets. By analyzing this information, we can determine what changes are possible in the planning of downtown activities and economic development to improve foot traffic, success among businesses, and to increase the overall economic vitality of the downtown area.

Customer/Client Traffic

- Surveyed business owners responded that the busiest times of the week are:
 - * *Most of the responses were fairly uniform across all times; excluding after 5pm. See the detailed results that follow this report*
 - Monday – Friday 11 am -2 pm
 With only a slightly lower percent for Monday – Friday 2 pm – 5 pm
 - Saturday 11 am – 2 pm
- Respondents felt certain community events increased their business’s foot traffic or sales volume. Town and County Days garnered the most responses. A large number of respondents indicated the “none” response.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Mean: -
Town and County Days	14	29.17	
Easter Parade	1	2.08	
Beach Bush	0	0.00	
farmers market	6	12.50	
city band performances	2	4.17	
art festival	8	16.67	
fall festival	11	22.92	
witches night out	5	10.42	
classic Christmas wkend	12	25.00	
Harley ride	4	8.33	
other	2	4.17	
None	22	45.83	
Missing	1	2.08	

- A majority of respondents described their target market as:
 - Female
 - Ages 25-54
 - Annual household income \$35,000 - \$75,000

These generalized results are broad; for a more detailed picture of target market it may be useful to extract results based on business type or NAICS code.














Advertising

- 71 percent of respondents reported they did not utilize any radio advertising. But, among those that did, the most popular outlet was WTTN 1580 out of Watertown; which only garnered 6 percent of responses.
- Likewise, 77 percent of respondents said they do not utilize any television advertising. Again only garnering 6 percent of responses, CBS 3; WISC-TV Madison was the most popular choice.
- As expected, advertising dollars are generally spent on local publications. Below is the detailed break down of the respondent's use of each outlet. The LM Leader garnered by far the most results. The numbers indicate that most respondents utilize more than one publication











Response	Frequency	Percent	Mean: -
Jefferson Adv	8	16.67	
LM Leader	30	62.50	
Watertown Daily	17	35.42	
Jefferson Union	6	12.50	
WI state Journal	2	4.17	
Milw. Journal	1	2.08	
Madison Magz	0	0.00	
Other	7	14.58	
other	3	6.25	
other	1	2.08	
other	0	0.00	
none	8	16.67	
Missing	2	4.17	

Competition

- A majority of business owners responded that the following traits helped in a large degree to make their business more competitive:
 - Service
 - Quality
 - Location
 - Selection
 To a lesser degree, respondents noted:
 - Parking
 - Hours
 - Brands
 - Price
- Respondents would like to see the following businesses available downtown. By far the most selected business was bakery. Other popular responses were apparel business, sporting goods and restaurants.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Mean: -
bakery	30	62.50	
furniture store	3	6.25	
women's apparel	16	33.33	
men's apparel	13	27.08	
Children's apparel	5	10.42	
book store	13	27.08	
sporting goods	12	25.00	
restaurant	11	22.92	
home accessories	7	14.58	
gift shop	10	20.83	
garden accessories	5	10.42	
other	8	16.67	
Missing	4	8.33	

- Respondents would like to see the following community assets developed. Leading responses included golf courses, bike trails and expanded public parking.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Mean: -
Golf Course	13	27.08	
bike trail / rental / tracks	12	25.00	
boat docks and landings	8	16.67	
community center	8	16.67	
skateboard park	5	10.42	
expanded green space	4	8.33	
expanded public parking	11	22.92	
none of these	9	18.75	
other	7	14.58	
Missing	9	18.75	

Considerations

Using the information we have gathered from the business owner surveys, this section identifies important needs and potential opportunities. In no way does this section replace local knowledge and expertise, instead, it is intended to supplement and direct your knowledge.

- Many respondents feel assistance with advertising and marketing is a critical need. More specifically, the section on proposed Main Street tools reveals that respondents feel advertising and marketing the downtown community as a shopping destination would be very useful. Successful advertising may also help address the major challenge of leakage to out-of-town competition.
- Downtown public improvements and building improvements were repeatedly mentioned in this survey. In total, 34 percent of respondents reported that they would benefit from building improvement assistance, and 33 percent claim they are currently considering building improvements. Likewise, downtown public improvement projects, signage grants and business improvement grants were among the highest ranked proposed Main Street products. This data may point to an opportunity to provide assistance with façade and building improvement in order to strengthen Downtown's sense of place.
- Available counseling programs such as SBDC, SCORE and COMMERCE offer business owners technical services with little to no cost. However, the vast majority of respondents claim they are unsure if they would utilize these services, or they simply would not consider their use. Therefore, it may be beneficial to take steps to make business owners more aware of the advantages of participating in these programs.
- When respondents were asked what community events increased their business's foot traffic, 46 percents felt none of the current community events benefited their business. This may indicate a need and opportunity to provide community events targeted at bringing customers downtown. Although there were also strong responses in favor of Town and Country Days and Classic Christmas; so clearly success is being had with event participation and business traffic.
- The benefits of the park and park activities are mentioned throughout the write in questions. In particular, being near the park is frequently mentioned as a desirable characteristic of business location. Likewise, the park and park events were common reasons for why, other than shopping, people come downtown. Given its success it may be important to consider how to preserve and strengthen the park as a community asset.
- A relatively significant percentage (35%) of respondents said they are considering expanding business operations in downtown Lake Mills. This presents an opportunity to recruit and expand traffic generating business in the Downtown environment.

The following documents provide more detailed results from the business owner survey. The "Condensed Item Analysis" provides response levels for each question, and the "Response Report by Item" presents a list of all survey write-ins.