



Gift 'n Gab Trading Post

Gift 'n Gab Trading Post

*Thompson Rivers University A
Marketing Case Study*

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Introduction

This case study explores marketing issues in a unique retail setting. Not only does it include aspects of destination and tourism marketing, it also addresses challenges of Indigenous business ownership and an Indigenous product focus.

As a significant and important niche business in British Columbia and across Canada, Indigenous business ownership is growing and flourishing. The following case outlines the current situation for Gift 'N Gab (GNG) Trading Post, setting the scene for students to assess marketing opportunities, justify marketing recommendations, and rationalize strategic marketing approaches.



Fig 1: Sign outside the store (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

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Teachers Resources

Gift 'n Gab Trading Post Teachers Resources



Fig 2: Entrance to Gift n' Gab Trading Post in Barriere, BC (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Course Fit

The case analysis encourages students to conduct research into topics such as Indigenous businesses, unique marketing challenges, approaches to create brand identities, product selection, and the intricacies of tourism marketing. Students will suggest marketing strategies that can overcome these challenges and make GNG flourish into the future. By analyzing

this case, students will be exposed to the following marketing topics:

- Marketing Strategy
- Marketing Research
- Competitive Advantage
- Brand Identity
- Brand Loyalty
- Indigenous Business
- Tourism Marketing
- Destination Marketing
- Retailing
- Positioning
- Consumer Behaviour
- Decision-Making Processes
- Marketing Communications

The analysis opportunities given through this case fit any advanced marketing course, whether graduate or undergraduate, assuming students have had exposure to basic marketing courses as well as specific marketing topics such as marketing strategy, marketing research, and consumer behaviour.

Suggestions for Use

The information in this case is suitable for specific assignment questions in multiple marketing areas. Instructors using this case may provide students with their own questions, based on the topic of their courses and the content they have covered. Below are some suggestions on the topics that can be covered through an analysis of this case.

Consumer Behaviour:

- Apply decision-making concepts and steps to this case
- Apply attitude models to this situation and target audience
- Apply concepts of cultural values and reference groups to this case
- Identify suitable subcultures to be targeted
- Identify cultural influences on the behaviour of GNG's customers

E-Commerce:

- Investigate the benefits of spending time and money to start e-commerce operations
- Research the objectives for an improved website
- Research opportunities to tie into other e-commerce operations
- Assess how e-commerce operations would fit with the Indigenous focus of the store
- Identify competitors in a potential e-commerce setting

Advertising:

- Determine appropriate information to be included on highway signage
- Identify suitable print publications for advertising
- Evaluate research on the effectiveness of radio advertising for local businesses
- Design an advertising plan and budget for social media ads
- Investigate additional directories that could be beneficial

for GNG

Tourism Marketing:

- Suggest additional services that could appeal to tourists
- Identify triggers for travelers to visit roadside attractions
- Determine appropriate channels for marketing this tourist attraction
- Research the success of other tourism attractions with an Indigenous focus in BC
- Investigate current trends in tourism marketing



Fig 3: Gift n' Gab Trading Post sign in Barriere, BC

Teaching Notes

Below, please find some select marketing ideas that students can be prompted to identify and research, especially if the case is used in a classroom setting:

- Using the website to sell higher priced items, providing customers, the opportunity to research before a visit
- Including references to the salmon products on the highway signage and in ads
- Pursuing a connection with the Rocky Mountaineer business that brings many tourists to Kamloops (e.g., as a day trip)
- Connecting with Sun Peaks to tie to the resort business in the summer and winter
- Establishing ties with other tourism attractions in the area
- Collecting contact information such as email, for example by using a guest book
- Tailoring the suggestions to the typical age of the customer (e.g., for social media ideas and for product recommendations)

Sample Instructions for Students

Considering the information given in this case study, your task is to apply marketing concepts to recommend a marketing strategy and approach for the Gift 'n Gab Trading post.

Please note that the goal is not to find out what was actually done but to research options, explain your decisions and elaborate on your chosen marketing approach. The emphasis is on justifying your choices by utilizing your knowledge of marketing theories and concepts, as well as supporting your choices with academic sources.

Time frame: 2 years

Budget: CA\$ 5,000 per year

Components: Marketing channels, messages, timing/schedule, brand personality, target audience

The goal is to increase exposure for GNG by applying marketing concepts in various areas (e.g., consumer behaviour), keeping in mind the limited human resources available. Students should also focus on suggestions that create brand loyalty and form long term relationships for GNG.

All recommendations should be based on a detailed analysis of the target audience, including creating a persona. Key performance metrics should be recommended and justified. Benefits and challenges for any suggestions and recommendations need to be clearly stated. Students are expected to research marketing concepts, assess brand positioning, analyze competitors, and justify any product strategy modifications. Recommendations should integrate multiple marketing channels with a combination of mass communications—such as advertising, promotions, or events—as well as personal communications—such as direct marketing, word of mouth, or personal selling.

1. Overview and History of the Business

GNG is located in Barriere, BC, and it is owned by Kathie Heard, a carrier of the Wet'suwet'en Nation in Smithers, BC. After many years living in Edmonton, Alberta, Kathie and her husband relocated to Barriere, in July of 2015, on a whim and based on a somewhat random alignment of decisions, taking a courageous plunge into business ownership in BC.

With a background in finance and accounting, Kathie was not ready to retire and instead followed her dream of operating her own business: either a deli/café or a gift shop. Kathie and her husband had noticed that there were no other gift shops of the kind they imagined between Alberta and the West Coast, while there are plenty of shops in Vancouver. After finding a suitable property during their travels in Barriere, consisting of a log building with residence included, the GNG gift shop was born. A gift shop avoided the health regulations affecting a food establishment and enabled Kathie to offer a very unique selection of primarily First Nations gifts and items made in Canada. The move to BC and the running of the business also connected Kathie and her family back to her origins and roots. Kathie is open to share her First Nations heritage and knowledge with anyone who is interested.



Fig 4: Kathie Heard, owner of Gift n' Gab (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Her husband John up with the name “Gift ‘n Gab”, while the addition of “Trading Post” seemed to clarify for customers the type of store; “Trading Post” has also turned into the short name for the shop. First Nations artist Clifton Fred assisted in creating the GNG logo: Feathers represent the “Gab” in the name and the encouragement to stop in and connect, while the traditional BC Indigenous colours—black, red, and white—are represented in the logo.



Fig 5: Gift n' Gab Trading Post — inside the store (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

“The eagle feather plays a substantial part in religious and shamanic practices and ceremonies. The eagle feather transmits strength; it gives the ability to speak honestly from the heart, without hurt or anger. The middle vane in the feather symbolizes the path that every man walks in their life time, and every barb that comes of the middle vane symbolizes the choices we all have in life, and that every choice we make is

attached to the middle or main path that we take. Eagle feathers are used while smudging along with praying. The feathers were also given as symbolic gift to impart respect for accomplishment and display of courage and wisdom.”

GNG is 100% aboriginally owned and operated; Kathie is the sole owner and full-time operator of the shop. Her daughters and her husband help out at the store. Currently the store is open every day from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm during the summer and is wheelchair accessible.

What sets the business apart besides the unique products is Kathie’s desire to meet people; there is no sales pressure, and even visitors who are curious just to stop and check out the store are warmly welcomed.

Listen to Audio Clip 1 – Introduction to Gift ‘N Gab (Transcript Available) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



An audio element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can listen to it online here:

<https://giftngab.pressbooks.tru.ca/?p=120>

“We offer good old-fashioned friendly customer service. We spend a lot of time visiting with the customers, some of whom don’t even purchase anything and that’s okay. We are interested in exchanging stories about our journeys and hearing the same from those who want to share.”

Products Details

GNG exclusively carries First Nations products from BC or Canada, setting itself apart from other shops in Jasper or Vancouver. From the offerings of companies such as Manitoba Mukluks, a company that offers both Canadian-made and internationally made products, GNG will only carry the Canada-made ones. Very few exceptions to this rule are made for items not manufactured in Canada, such as mugs or select apparel. In those cases, Kathie makes sure that the designs originate from First Nations, even if the products are created overseas.

Kathie openly shares her First Nations heritage with her customers by offering Indigenous products of all kinds. The only exception to sharing First Nations products and customs with anyone interested are ceremonial blankets or carvings, which are reserved for First Nations ceremonies.

Other products include wood art, crystal, smudging supplies, herbs, candles, cards, apparel, jewelry, candied salmon, salmon jerky, and coffee. Kathie also owns an industrial-sized embroidery machine to customize apparel on her own, such as adding the coyote, a spirit animal, to select items. As much as possible, Kathie provides tourism information when travelers ask her questions, although the official tourist/visitor information booth is located in downtown Barriere, off the highway.

One of the most popular product categories is salmon, especially wild BC/local salmon. Kathie maintains a business relationship with Riverfresh Wild BC Salmon in Kamloops and really promotes salmon sales. This product entices a lot of people to stop, and even turn around, to come into the store.



Fig 6: Salmon display at Gift 'n Gab Trading Post (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

“Salmon is a huge draw!”

Due to questions from the customers, offering food might be a consideration for the future for GNG, possibly allowing a food truck to set up in front of the shop. It would encourage travelers to stop, particularly if special food is served, such as Kathie's idea of salmon and bannock burgers, as well as ice cream. The challenges here are additional staff requirements and meeting food preparation regulations.

Kathie travels to gift shows in Vancouver and Edmonton two or three times a year, where she looks exclusively for items made in Canada and First Nations designs. She also has personal relationships with many suppliers of unique crafts and products. Kathie supports local artists and also connected with the local Secwepemc Nation representatives to show her respect—as a visitor to the territory—by letting them know about her business and to encourage local artisans to offer their products in her store. In addition, random encounters on road trips have also resulted in relationships with artists, such as a chain saw carver that made the bears and wolves displayed outside the store. In addition, artists sometimes stop at her store and introduce their products, such as the late Brian Grandbois's (Cold Lake First Nations, Alberta) art cards.

“I try to have as much local stuff as I can. But because we're so close to the coast, a lot of the stuff is going to come from the coast.”

The products are sold exclusively in the retail store, not online or at events. On rare occasions Kathie has delivered purchases to customers when it matched her travel schedule.

GNG plans to update the product selection on a regular basis. Kathie also found out by trial and error what sells and what doesn't sell (e.g., specific designs), originally selecting inventory that suited her own taste and learning through the years to accommodate the customers' tastes. Overall, GNG's product selection is based on the store's audience as outlined below,

for example offering products for a more advanced age group instead of carrying “hot sellers” for younger, urban customers.

Examples of artists whose products the store carries:

- Chilliwack artist Michael Forbes
- Renowned artist Wade Baker
- Carvings from Richard Baker
- Art by Richard’s son Troy and brother Matthew (represented at the Vancouver airport)

Listen to Audio Clip 2 – Consumer Behaviour ([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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<https://giftngab.pressbooks.tru.ca/?p=120>

Listen to Audio Clip 3 – Tourism and Marketing ([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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<https://giftngab.pressbooks.tru.ca/?p=120>

Pricing

Compared to competitors’ offerings, GNG maintains price

levels that are at the lower end of the range for these type of products in gift stores.

“All of the feedback that I get on the products that we carry, is that our stuff is very, very fairly priced. And that makes me happy, because that was one of my goals.”

The most popular and fastest-selling price range is 20-40 CAD. Products with prices higher than that take longer to sell, often remaining on the shelf for over a year, as customers would have to be specifically looking for those items.

Kathie has considered marketing guidelines with regards to what percentage of the shop space should contain products in a particular price range but realized that by trying different products and prices, she would eventually in the end find the best combination.

“It’s all trial and error.”

No discounts have been applied to the products, given the competitive pricing strategy. In the past, rack cards that were distributed contained discounts but the interest seemed low.

Customers

As a general rule, Kathie's customers are 35 years and older. They tend to be very educated in the specifics of the products they enjoy (for example, asking for very specific smudging ingredients). They are aware of typical West Coast aboriginal designs and ask questions of the origins. For example, Kathie works with an artist in Edmonton whose ancestry is Apache so the designs reflect this and the customers' questions show the awareness. Typically, her customers are looking for BC designs

and products, which are very different from designs from other regions.

In general, a lot of Europeans and travellers from neighbouring provinces frequent the store. Some tour buses have stopped in the past. The teepees in particular attract a lot of First Nations customers, many from Alberta and Saskatchewan as well as some from Northern BC. Kathie also works with B&Bs that recommend the store to their customers, who are often interested in the salmon products.

Typically, travelers who passed the store in the past tend to stop in on subsequent visits to the region. In recent years, highway closures due to fires also “forced” a lot of travellers onto the highway through Barriere, which introduced them to the shop. There are also many repeat customers from Kamloops. Kathie exclaims:

“Now they know it’s here!”

Contact information from the customers has not been collected due to the strict privacy laws in Canada. Kathie also mentioned:

“I just don’t want to be that store.”

She wants the customers to leave happy, even if only stories were exchanged. There should be no pressure to buy.



Fig 7: Sign outside the store (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)



Fig 8: Smudging supplies on display in the Gift n' Gab Trading Post (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)



Fig 9: Moccasins on display in the Gift n' Gab Trading Post (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Finances

The business was 100% personally financed, including all initial travel to acquire inventory.

2. Marketing Approaches

GNG faces the task to attract visitors who live in the area and/or are passing through the town of Barriere. Located north of Kamloops on the way to Wells Gray Park, the town is easily accessible yet removed from other major highways in British Columbia. For that reason, and in Kathie's own estimate, word of mouth is critically important and valuable. She wants customers to enjoy their visit and have a great personal shopping experience:

“As long as they leave, even empty handed, happy, they will tell others about what a family friendly place the Gift ‘N Gab Trading Post is. Hence, word of mouth will travel.”

Current & Past Approaches

In its first year of operation, GNG purchased radio advertising: It ran on the local radio station, numerous times every day, 365 days a year. During the second year, the radio ads only ran during the summer months, to reach travelers listening to the local station while visiting the area. In addition, that year radio ads were run in Kamloops during the Canada 150 year celebrations. Kathie mentioned that the return on investment for radio ads is difficult to track, without asking every customer whether they heard the radio ad.

Kathie met with a website coach to work on a website, accessible at <http://www.giftngab.ca/>, and get help for the signs along the highway in front of her store. Not a lot of work has

been put into the website, as it can get costly with no guarantee of a return on investment that other channels provide. E-commerce is not an option at this time as the family-run business does not have the human resources nor financial capacity to implement this. Kathie is able to maintain the website on her own and add pictures as needed, but it takes up valuable time, and any redesign would add even more to the time requirements. Some customers have mentioned visiting the website.

GNG has a Facebook page, created by Kathie's daughter, that is used to communicate with existing and potential customers. Kathie's husband has purchased paid advertising on Facebook to promote new products and other information; these ads were targeted by demographic and geographic segmentation. Currently, the Facebook page is also the only option for customers to leave feedback and publish testimonials.



Fig 10: Indigenous designs on water bottles in the Gift n' Gab Trading Post (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

The store also works with businesses in the region that refer

travelers to the shop. For example, rack cards have been distributed to B&Bs and the Kamloops, Clearwater, and Barriere tourist information centres. In an attempt to track the effectiveness, rack cards were numbered and signed, keeping track of the origin when they were brought back to the store. Kathie has also ordered custom wrapping paper for the store and puts stickers with her logo on paper shopping bags she supplies to customers.

The store purchased print ads in the North Thompson tourism magazine and the Backroads Map book, targeting different audiences with relatively inexpensive ads for multi-year exposure. GNG is also listed in the directory for Indigenous Tourism BC.

The teepees outside the store were added during the second year to improve the attraction to travelers. Kathie had realized that the highway sign was too low, too small, and had not been improved since the previous building owner. Additional highway signage further down the highway is regulated by provincial laws. So far, efforts to be included in general signage, indicating the approach of a gift shop, have been unsuccessful as the community was planning their own approach to signs along the highway.

Listen to Audio Clip 4 – E-Commerce ([Transcript Available](#)) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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Watch Video Clip – Advertising (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0):



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Marketing Opportunities

GNG wants to grow their business, serving local and tourism markets. To create a competitive advantage in the highly competitive tourism industry is not easy but GNG is motivated to stand out and take on this challenge. Kathie is committed and true to her Indigenous history and the authentic focus of the store. Future efforts to solidify the brand identity have to reflect the Indigenous ownership.

To boost the currently inadequate highway sign directly in front of the store, additional highway signage has been considered, as budget allows. These signs would use keywords to promote the most popular products. Ditch signs are common but typically illegal and can be removed by the province, while billboards on private property require payments to the owner. The opportunities to find a land owner who would allow those signs have improved as more connections have been made in the community. Billboards starting in Kamloops could also prepare drivers traveling north on the highway for the upcoming store.



Fig 11: Gift n' Gab Trading Post sign in Barriere, BC (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

“For where I am and the type of business that I have, I need roadside attraction.”

A few tour buses have stopped in the past but tour bus operators have not been approached by GNG. How to access this industry has to be researched as it could be valuable. The store is an appropriate distance from Kamloops for a stop, with few options for interesting stops around and good parking space provided. The store is wheelchair accessible, and Kathie has considered adding picnic tables to the front area, which could be attractive to RVs and wheelchair-bound travelers.

While no other social media platforms besides Facebook have been used so far, Kathie has plans to join TripAdvisor when updated pictures are available that show the improved front area of the store. Kathie would like to learn how to use the TripAdvisor analytics for review of any marketing activities there and take advantage of this huge platform, such as reviews from customers to become a top-rated attraction.

Collecting and publishing reviews or feedback could boost the reputation of the store. Currently Kathie does not actively ask for feedback but has considered mentioning “like us” on the bottom of the store receipt. In addition, other platforms that allow for reviews, such as Google, could be utilized.

To further increase exposure, opportunities such as working with the Rocky Mountaineer or other tourism attractions in the area could be pursued. Kathie is also considering holding events such as dances or story telling experiences. There are also resources that provide marketing support for Indigenous businesses. In addition, plans exist to work with a marketing coach to update the website, work on brochures, and discuss bigger highway signage and frontage attractions.

3. Resources and Credits

Resources

Information included in this case study was collected via email and during a personal interview with GNG's owner, Kathie Heard. All quotes listed in this case study are from the interview with Kathie in Barriere, BC.

Heard, K. (2019, May 28). Personal interview.

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Credits

Kathie Heard, Owner, Gift n' Gab

Kathie's partnership and guidance while creating this case study have been invaluable.

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