

Austy's Bookstore:

Leveraging an Online and Social Media Presence to Increase Customer Engagement

Bookstore Team 2:

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The team would like to sincerely thank our client, Dusty Baker, for not only sharing with us her time, but allowing us to learn more about her business, *Austy's Bookstore*. It has been a pleasure getting to hear more of Dusty's story and help contribute to her business through this project. We've found not only a fulfilling academic experience through this project, but friendship with one another on the team and a local entrepreneur to look to as a new role model.

We wish you great success moving forward. Thank you.

Executive Summary

The team was tasked with researching and recommending both cost and time effective ideas for Dusty Baker, a local bookstore owner, to implement. The client emphasized during client meetings the need for the team's recommendations to be achievable in a relatively short amount of time, but also highly impactful to the community. Increasing visibility of the bookstore within the Washington County community and increasing engagement were two key themes that emerged from conversations with the client.

To address the needs of the client, the team focused on developing research-supported recommendations that were easy to implement, both from a financial standpoint and with the client's timeline in mind. The team conducted background research on the background of the business, *Austy's Bookstore*, independent bookstores, demographics of consumption, and demographics of Washington County, Indiana.

The four main facets of research conducted by the team yielded three main recommendations. First, the team recommends *Austy's Bookstore* starts posting on a TikTok social media account to increase community awareness of the business. Second, the team recommends that the business's website develop more brand recognition by adopting a distinct logo and brand colors. Finally, the team recommends that moving forward, both the social media accounts and the website of the business be uniform with one another in style, logos, and messaging.

Project Description

The team was tasked with researching and recommending ways to increase customer engagement with *Austy's Bookstore*, a small business located in Washington County, Indiana. Per the client's request, the team focused on cost and time effective recommendations.

Client Description

Washington County

Washington County, Indiana, located in the south-central part of the state, has a population of approximately 28,000 as of 2019 US Census estimates.¹ Of that population, more than 98% of residents are considered "white alone", and 97.8% of households speak English as their only language.² Of the 1788 firms in the county, 327 are women owned, and only 168 are veteran owned.³

Austy's Bookstore

Since 2017, *Austy's Bookstore* has been serving members of Washington County, Indiana and providing the community with a comfortable environment to shop, read, and gather. Together with her son Austin, Dusty Baker has worked tirelessly over the past few years to provide the community with a diverse general selection of adult, young adult, and children's books, plus artisan foods, and crafts.⁴ Dusty prides herself on owning and operating a family run business

¹ "Washington County, Indiana". *United States Census Bureau*.
<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0500000US18175>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Baker, Dusty. *Austy's Bookstore*, <https://austys.com/>

which is also woman-veteran owned, that is welcoming to all who choose to support their mission.⁵ In a 2017 interview with the American Booksellers Association, Dusty highlighted how she prioritized reusing everything possible from the building that she bought to open *Austy's Bookstore*. Dusty felt as though it was representative of the community to open her business in this matter. She said, “we’re bringing back a historic building and restoring it to what it originally was -a bookseller’s- and I think just being on the square, it’s a comfortable, down-to-earth place. It’s a place where people in the community can come together.”⁶ *Austy's Bookstore* has become a welcoming and comfortable place for all members of Washington County, and there is even a meeting room in the center of the shop which is available for customers who want to use Wi-Fi, charge their devices, or sip on tea and coffee sold in the bookstore.⁷

Sustainability Justification

Research shows that there is a strong correlation between independent bookstores and community well-being, literacy, community gathering spaces, sustainability, and resilience. With all of the instability going on around us, many people have found a major haven and oasis in independent bookstores and learned to reap the benefits. According to an article by Writers Digest, “independent bookstores directly serve the community and the individual. Their contributions are invaluable- and in ways that aren’t being replicated online. Independent bookstores support core values of community, creativity, convening, civility, and contact.”⁸ Independent bookstores foster creativity, help to shape the minds of young people, serve as a safe space for members of the community, and provide a warm and welcoming space for people to gather and share ideas.

Shopping locally at independent bookstores is also much kinder on the environment. Picking up books at your local bookstore means there will be much less packaging and waste. In addition, there will be no shipping costs and less trucking and other transportation, further reducing the carbon footprint of the transaction.⁹ Independent bookstores can further their positive impact on the environment by purchasing energy-efficient light bulbs, using green packaging, and selling reusable shopping bags with the store’s logo on them. Some bookstores even host gently used book drives to allow members of the community to recycle old and unwanted books. Independent bookstores and their owners are in an incredible position to help reduce their carbon footprint and make a difference at a local level.

Research Methodology

On March 10, 2021, the team had the opportunity to speak with the client to learn more about the client’s most immediate business priorities. Community engagement and awareness emerged as key themes throughout the conversation. This meeting helped the team decide on four key pathways to approach background research from: research on the past and current state of *Austy's Bookstore*, independent bookstore research, the demographics of consumption, and the

⁵ Baker, Dusty. *Austy's Bookstore*, <https://austys.com/>

⁶ ABA Staff. “Around Indies.” *The American Booksellers Association*, 6 Oct. 2017, www.bookweb.org/news/around-indies-37188.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Column, Guest. “Why Independent Bookstores Matter Now More Than Ever.” *Writer's Digest*, *Writer's Digest*, 1 Mar. 2018, www.writersdigest.com/be-inspired/why-independent-bookstores-matter-now-more-than-ever.

⁹ Peterson, Valerie. “Unique, Local Benefits of Independent Booksellers.” *The Balance Careers*, 2019, www.thebalancecareers.com/independent-booksellers-unique-local-benefits-2800159.

demographics of the Washington County population overall. These four research targets helped shape the team’s recommendations, shared later.

On April 6, 2021, the team met with a research and instruction librarian from the Business/SPEA library at IU Bloomington to inquire about the various databases and information repositories available for use. During this meeting, the team was given more specific details about the capabilities of various databases and what they could best be used for. Additionally, the librarian recommended that to yield the best results, search terms would have to be more general than the granular level the team initially searched for. Rather than trying to find data related to mobile bookstores, for example, the team was encouraged to search for data related to bookstores more generally.¹⁰

Bookstore’s Current State

It goes without saying that the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic has certainly taken a toll on the independent bookstore industry as a whole. Independent bookstores across the country are all facing an uncertain and difficult future as government assistance has dried up, foot traffic is still low, and the virus is again threatening to bring everything to a screeching halt.¹¹ Even though independent bookstore owners dug deep into their wells of creativity and passion and found ways to transform their businesses to cope with Covid-19, the American Booksellers Association claims that 35 member bookstores have closed during the pandemic, with roughly one store closing each week.¹² Revenue for the bookstore industry has fallen in 2020 as the recent Covid-19 pandemic has forced industry operators to close down their stores temporarily, furthering the industry’s decline as consumers turn to online retailers.¹³ While 2020 certainly saw a spike in reading for many people stuck at home, independent bookstores were unable to compete with Amazon’s size and scale, thus creating an almost impossible situation for independent bookstores to stay alive.

When asked how Covid-19 is affecting *Austy’s Bookstore’s* daily operations and sales, Dusty said, “while caution keeps our boutique shopping closed, we remain diligent in providing access to the best new books available. You can always find the latest Indie Next titles on our shopping site, and we remain available for mobile events and book fairs. Even online book fairs, a great option for school and group fundraisers!”¹⁴

Independent Bookstores

The independent bookstore industry is extremely complex as it includes a multitude of important varying factors that each contribute to the business’s success. There is a constant increase in online retail, large cooperation domination, and e-book development. This has posed a serious threat to the industry as a whole. However, there has been and will continue to be a demand for books. In 2015, data was collected proving the book industry as a whole to be valued at \$113 billion.¹⁵ Of

¹⁰ Arave, Gary. Research and Instruction Librarian, Business/SPEA Library. April 6, 2021. Zoom.

¹¹ Covert, Bryce. “How Bookstores Are Weathering the Pandemic.” *Vox*, Vox, 25 Oct. 2020, www.vox.com/the-goods/2020/10/25/21517545/bookstores-pandemic-booksellers-closing.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Fernandez, Cecilia. “Book Stores in the US.” *IBIS World*, Feb. 2021, my-ibisworld-com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/us/en/industry/45121/about.

¹⁴ Baker, Dusty. *Austy’s Bookstore*, <https://austys.com/>

¹⁵ Gaille, Bradon. 24 Bookstore Industry Statistics and Trends, BrandonGaille Small Business and Marketing Advice. June 20, 2018.

this reported data, this included the 2,300 independent bookstores in the United States which is responsible for \$750,000 of the total revenue.



Figure 1 Operating Independent Bookstores Since 2009¹⁶

Independent bookstores rely on their day-to-day sales to maintain success. Each day, independent bookstores bring in an average of \$697 in revenue. This more specifically breaks down to 14 transactions a day with one customer spending an average of \$48.24.¹⁷ Independent bookstores must capitalize during their most successful periods. The most profitable days of the year for these businesses are the three days leading up to Christmas Eve as well as the middle of August.¹⁸ This coincides with the most successful days of the week for bookstores.

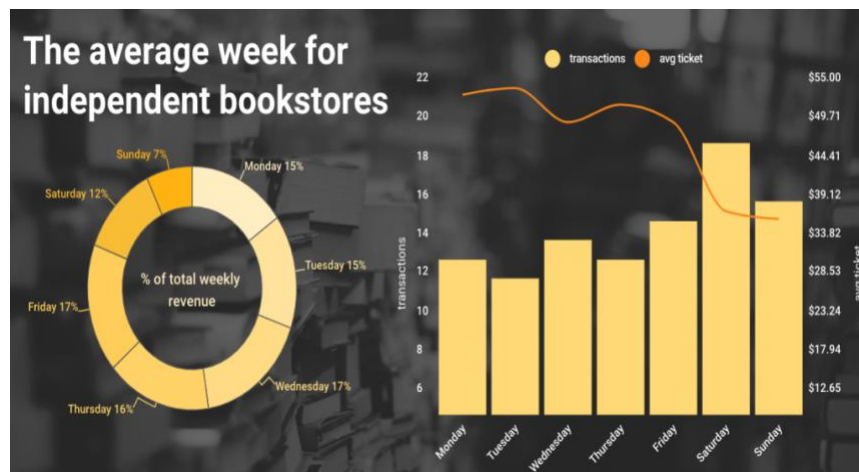


Figure 2 Average Weekly Revenue¹⁹

¹⁶ Gaille, Bradon. 24 Bookstore Industry Statistics and Trends, BrandonGaille Small Business and Marketing Advice. June 20, 2018.

¹⁷ Womply. Celebrating Independent Bookstore Day 2019: How much do local, independent bookstores make? October 26, 2020.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Over 54% of independent bookstores are closed on Sundays. This makes Saturdays their most profitable day of business. While more consumers enter their shop on weekends, they make smaller purchases as seen from the decrease in ticket price from figure 2. The larger transactions are majority made during the weekdays.²⁰

Demographics of Consumption

Books in general are heavily consumed by the population aged 45 and up. According to IBIS world, 36.9% are consumers over the age of 65 and 32.8% are ages 45-64. Consumers aged 25-44 are not far behind consuming 23% of the market share in 2021.²¹ The Industry Revenue prediction for the year 2021 is \$9.6 billion.²² In 2020, consumer spending on books was down 3.9% causing revenues to be down 10.8%.²³ We can infer that this was a result of the long-term lockdowns that occurred throughout the country in 2020. The market is expected to bounce back this year and return to positive revenue and consumer spending. Specifically in the state of Indiana, 69.9% of readers who have read for leisure in the past 12 months are women and ages 18-34 makeup 29.2% of leisure book readers.²⁴ E-Commerce book sales are projected to increase. As a higher percentage of people become internet users, we can expect those numbers to increase within the next year. In 2020, we saw a major dip in book sales across the nation as people began to cut down on discretionary spending. According to IBIS World, “Consumer spending is expected to increase in 2021, representing a potential opportunity for the industry.”²⁵

Demographics of Washington County

As recommended by Gary Arave, Research and Instruction Librarian at the Business/SPEA Library, demographic data related to Washington County, Indiana was sourced from the United States Census website.²⁶ The data found from this source was from the 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates report, an ongoing annual report conducted by the same bureau. At the time of this report, the 2020 report had not yet been published. Demographic figures can be found above in the *Washington County* section of the Client Description section.

Recommendations

Social Media

Social media usage is extremely important, especially for small businesses. It creates communication between potential customers and owners. It is a way to advertise a business as the value it can provide the customer. One of the newest, and predominantly used by millennials, forms of social media is the app TikTok. A new phrase “bookTok” now exists which has created a community of reading and writing enthusiasts. This has extended to all areas of social media including people creating blogs such as the famous “TikTok Made Me Read It”.²⁷ This platform

²⁰ Womply. Celebrating Independent Bookstore Day 2019: How much do local, independent bookstores make? October 26, 2020.

²¹ Fernandez, Cecilia. “Book Stores in the US.” *IBIS World*, Feb. 2021

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “Simmons Insights.” *MRI*, 21 Feb. 2021, insights.mrisimmons.com/essentials/quickreports.

²⁵ Fernandez, Ibid.

²⁶ Arave, Gary. Research and Instruction Librarian, Business/SPEA Library. April 6, 2021. Zoom.

²⁷ O’Brien, Mary. “TikTok Made Me Read It”. Curious, August. 2020.

has become a connection point for many passionate readers and consumers constantly looking for the next suggested book to purchase.

There are two key factors for using TikTok. One is to find a niche. A great example with relation to the independent book industry would be to create a “book of the month”. This would increase exposure and following. Each month when a new book is chosen, customers will be more likely to make the purchase to stay involved with the readings, opinions, and posts made. The other important factor is the use of hashtags. For reference, this is TikTok’s constantly updating site of the most popular hashtags to use related to the book industry:

<https://tiktokhashtags.com/hashtag/books/>

The more relevant and popular hashtags that are used on the video, the more views it will have from others. There have been over 195.4 million views related to books on this app alone. This application will allow exposure to the younger generation that is very clearly eager about reading.

Website

A business’s website is essential for bringing people into their business. There is fundamental content that must be included on a website. A basic checklist includes name, address, phone, location, and hours.²⁸ Aside from the basic content, the content must grab the viewer’s attention. Adding appealing visuals and fonts allows the reader to become invested in the specifics of the website. The page must also subtly include what value they have to bring the consumer.²⁹ This must discreetly tell the viewer why their business should be chosen over others and why they are successful at what they do.

While a website is crucial, it must be conducted in the correct format to be effective. The three key aspects include being creative, consistent, and social.³⁰ One of the best tools for creativity for bookstore owners is a short blog. It gives the opportunity to connect new releases, favorite reads, recommendations, and much more all in one place. Consistency between the website and social media platforms allows the readers to be visually pleased and confident in choosing your business. Constantly creating new content to upload and linking it to your website increases the likelihood of exposure to a greater number of individuals. As more people visit the website, it will be shared with more people and result in continuous expansion.

Platform Uniformity

The most common, and recommended, forms of social media include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok. The best way to achieve uniformity is consistent and similar posts. It is recommended to post on Facebook 1-2 times/day, tweet 3-5 times/day, and LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok once a day.³¹ To aid with this taxing process, most social media platforms have a scheduling tool. This allows creators to post at the most optimal time to reach the greatest audience as well as serve as a daily reminder. The team compiled a weeks’ worth of content ideas into a

²⁸ McCray, Becky. The Giant Checklist of Social Media Marketing Basics for Small Town Business, Small Biz Survival. March 5, 2018

²⁹ Harbottle-Sear, Sue. 10 social media tips to help rural businesses raise their visibility, Marketing By Minimal. January 3, 2019.

³⁰ Bell, Erica. How To Run A Successful Bookstore Bog, Wishpond. 2021.

³¹ Harbottle-Sear, Ibid.

calendar located in the appendix. It includes daily posting prompts for Instagram, Twitter and Facebook as well as additional TikTok ideas.

Additional Resources

The team researched and found some additional considerations outside of the scope of the main recommendations. These ideas with related websites for reference are listed below.

- Celebrate Independent Bookstore Day on April 24th of each year to attract more customers and increase community engagement.
 - <https://www.womply.com/blog/celebrating-independent-bookstore-day-2019-how-much-do-local-independent-bookstores-make/>
- Host/join virtual events to engage with the community.
 - <https://diversebooks.org/how-to-support-independent-bookstores-right-now/>
 - <https://www.eventbrite.com/blog/70-event-ideas-and-formats-to-inspire-your-next-great-event-ds00/>
- Use Canva to create matching social media posts and marketing materials.
 - <https://www.canva.com/learn/5-smart-ways-to-use-canva-for-social-media/>
 - <https://www.canva.com/learn/a-step-by-step-guide-to-designing-from-scratch/>
- Host special events/sales during October, which is National Women’s Small Business Month.
 - <https://www.sba.gov/blog/sba-celebrates-october-national-womens-small-business-month>
- Look into the Small Business Administration’s 8(a) Business Development Program, which offers resources for small businesses and helps connect entrepreneurs with additional funding opportunities.
 - <https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/grow-your-business/women-owned-businesses>

Conclusion

To address both cost and time effectiveness requirements of this project, the team crafted a three faceted recommendation that includes streamlining social media, website, and cross-platform business communications. All three recommendations are feasible within a relatively short time span and are sustainable. Beyond the sustainable aspects of promoting and increasing access to literary materials, the recommendations within this report are achievable without any in-person engagement. This means the recommendations within this report minimize potential negative environmental impacts of business operations.

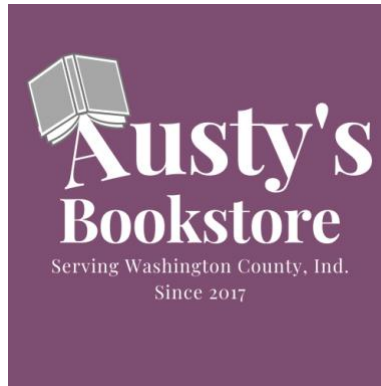
The team would like to thank Dusty Baker for her time over the course of this semester, and for allowing us to be of service to her and her business. The team would also like to extend our gratitude to Professor Kelly Eskew for her support throughout this project. We look forward to seeing the continued success of both *Austy’s Bookstore* and this class in the future.

Appendix

Example Logos

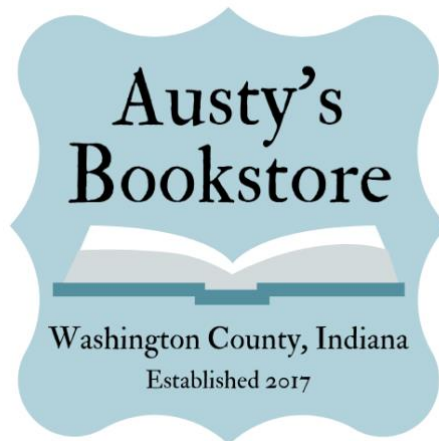
Example Logo 1:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEbsg0vVew/share/preview?token=IDTtPg7ev1If8pvjDwqByQ&role=EDITOR&utm_content=DAEbsg0vVew&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=sharebutton



Example Logo 2:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEbspK-mWs/share/preview?token=KpQf2uPRLYl8q8rx8-8I9Q&role=EDITOR&utm_content=DAEbspK-mWs&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=sharebutton



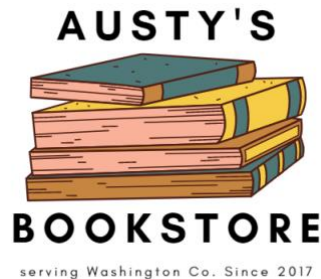
Example Logo 3:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEcIb27Acs/share/preview?token=MJPs8uT9atbJmYVuoP_WRQ&role=EDITOR&utm_content=DAEcIb27Acs&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=sharebutton



Example Logo 4:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEcIb27Acs/share/preview?token=MJPs8uT9atbJmYVuoP_WRQ&role=EDITOR&utm_content=DAEcIb27Acs&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=sharebutton































Example Logo 5:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEcIb27Acs/share/preview?token=MJPs8uT9atbJmYVuoP_WRQ&role=EDITOR&utm_content=DAEcIb27Acs&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=sharebutton



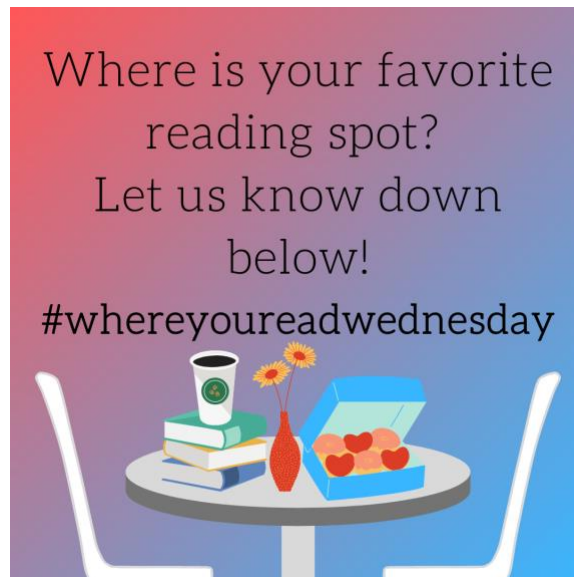
Social Media Calendar

MAY WEEK <u>1</u>	MONDAY <input type="checkbox"/>  BOOK OF THE MONTH ANNOUNCEMENT POST THE SAME POST ON INSTAGRAM, FACEBOOK AND TWITTER    BOOK OF THE MONTH TIK TOK ACCORDING TO CURRENT TREND USE HASHTAGS #BOOK #READING & #BOOKTOK	TUESDAY <input type="checkbox"/>  PUT A POLL ON YOUR STORIES ASKING FOLLOWERS WHAT THEIR FAVORITE GENRE OF BOOKS IS. INSTAGRAM, TWITTER AND FACEBOOK ALL HAVE STORY FUNCTIONS NEAR THE TOP OF THE FEED.   	WEDNESDAY <input type="checkbox"/>  #WHEREYOUREADWEDNESDAY POST YOUR FAVORITE READING SPOT AND ENCOURAGE FOLLOWERS TO COMMENT THEIRS POST ON INSTAGRAM, FACEBOOK AND TWITTER USING THE HASHTAG    SHOW A VIDEO OF YOUR READING SPOT AND USE HASHTAGS: #BOOK #READING & #BOOKTOK	THURSDAY <input type="checkbox"/>  MAKE A POST ABOUT YOU AND YOUR STORY OF HOW YOU GOT TO THIS POINT. POST THIS ON INSTAGRAM, FACEBOOK AND TWITTER    MAKE AN ABOUT AUSTY'S VIDEO INTRODUCING YOURSELF TO THE FOLLOWERS. USE #BOOK #READING #BOOKTOK
	FRIDAY <input type="checkbox"/>  QUOTE ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE AUTHORS AND POST A PICTURE OF ONE OF THEIR BOOKS TO ACCOMPANY IT. POST TO INSTAGRAM, FACEBOOK AND TWITTER.   	SATURDAY <input type="checkbox"/>  USE A "NATIONAL" HOLIDAY FROM THIS LIST ON THIS DATE TO CONNECT TO FOLLOWERS. FOR EXAMPLE, "TODAY IS NATIONAL HAVE A COKE DAY" IF YOU COULD SHARE A COKE WITH ANY AUTHOR WHO WOULD IT BE? EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER AND ENCOURAGE FOLLOWERS TO DO THE SAME. POST ON FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND INSTAGRAM    POST A VIDEO AND POSE THE SAME QUESTION AS ABOVE. USE #BOOK #READING #BOOKTOK	SUNDAY <input type="checkbox"/>  GIVE A SHOUTOUT TO SOMEONE OR ANOTHER LOCAL BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY AND SHARE WHAT YOU APPRECIATE ABOUT THEM. POST ON INSTAGRAM, TWITTER AND FACEBOOK. MAKE SURE TO TAG THEIR ACCOUNT.   	NOTES: IN ADDITION TO THE IDEAS LISTED HERE IT'S ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA TO REPOST, SHARE AND RETWEET THINGS GOING ON IN THE COMMUNITY OR SIMPLY FUN THINGS THAT RELATE TO YOUR FOLLOWERS.

Example Instagram Post

Post 1:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEcbPtm2i8/share/preview?token=he_o6e3EgfHITU0Lfsv4yw&role=EDITOR&utm_content=DAEcbPtm2i8&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=sharebutton



Post 2:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEcbDeSpOw/share/preview?token=lj34zwzcBONsEX_bxjI3zA&role=EDITOR&utm_content=DAEcbDeSpOw&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=sharebutton

