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Implementing a micro-business Internship program in Dangriga, Belize

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**An Honors Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of
Science in Business Administration in International Business**

**Sam M. Walton College of Business
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, Arkansas**

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Introduction

Over the Summer, I was able to work with Peacework in Belize through the University of Arkansas. While I was unable to physically go to Belize due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, I feel that I was still able to learn about the culture, in both the casual and business workplace, as well as help the people of Dangriga. The goal of my project was to help consult with the Tourism Department of Dangriga to help develop their small business into businesses that were more appealing to tourists. Unfortunately, most people who own small businesses in Dangriga can't support themselves with those businesses, so we put together a program to help the small business owners develop more efficient businesses. I, along with 3 colleagues, put together a 4-week "Small business Internship" program. Each week we focused on different aspects of business, to educate the business owners and give them the skills they need to create a business that can support them. Our program consisted of an assessment of current knowledge, general business resources, a crash course in finance, and advice on digital and physical marketing tools.

Literature

The developing world is full of microenterprises. They are the bases of most growing economies, and often make up thirty- three percent of businesses in developing nations. They make the market more competitive, which can drive growth of more isolated economies. These microenterprises often only have one owner and less than 5 employees, which is a commonality we saw while working with these enterprises in Belize (*The Pioneer*, 19 Dec. 2018). As of 2020 there were a total of 7,975 established businesses considered active in the country of Belize (Thiagarajan, Somanadevi. 2019). Seventy-seven percent are sole proprietorship and eighteen percent are companies. Many of these companies, in Belize and in other developing countries, are entrepreneurs out of necessity. These entrepreneurs are creating these businesses to boost themselves and in turn boost their economy. If their business is successful, they will hire and buy raw materials locally and have more money to buy other products within home communities. Setting up a business in Belize can easily be done informally or as a proprietor for a low cost. This means many of these business owners have had no real business training. However, studies have shown that access to business resources, training, and materials can increase profits both in the long run and the short run. So, it seemed like an initiative to help training these entrepreneurs in business practices would be a perfect solution for long lasting business practices. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor GEM (2016), from 2014 to 2016 entrepreneurship activity increased from 7.1 % to 28.8 % in Belize, so while there is an ever growing drive to be an entrepreneur in this country, they don't have the proper resources to create a successful business(Thiagarajan, Somanadevi. 2019). This necessity for advice and resources could radically change the small business environment of Dangriga. Microbusinesses are especially in need right now, as many have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Survey results show that 66% of microbusinesses are more likely to be affected by the crisis, than 42% for large companies ("News." *ITC*, 28 May 2020.). Around one out of four micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises are at risk to shut down permanently within the next three months. This highlights the need for governments to step in and for access to education can truly make a difference.

Background

Background on Belize and Dangriga

Belize was first established by the Maya around 1500 B.C.E. With colonialism came The Colony of British Honduras, which existed from 1840 to 1981, when Belize was granted independence. English is the official language of Belize, but people from Belize speak Kriol as well as other native languages like Garifuna, Spanish, or Maya based languages. Dangriga, known as the Culture Capital of Belize, is just a short 90 miles from Belize City (*Belize Private Island Resort and Getaway*, 14 Aug. 2019.). It is a tourist hub known for its friendly inhabitants, rich cultural blend, and beautiful ocean access, which happens to also be the access point to the Belize Barrier Reef, which is a UNESCO Heritage site (*Travel Belize*, 6 Aug. 2021.).

Background on the Dangriga Tourism Board

Over the past couple of years there has been a plan to hopefully spring Dangriga forward into a major tourist destination. While the city is rich in culture and destination sites, tourists are relatively unaware of the many attractions due to a lack of advertising and exposure. These plans were starting to be put in place in late 2019, but unfortunately had to be halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has led to the largest contraction in Belize in recent decades. The economy was projected to contract by 15.5% in 2020, owing much of this decline to tourism (ECLAC. Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean). Now, as things are starting to return to a semblance of normalcy in the tourism industry, Dangriga must be ready to try again and make a name for themselves against other well-known tourist destinations in Belize. They needed our support to help the small businesses in the area become more marketable to tourists as well as teach them how to sustain themselves long enough to profit off the major changes that the tourism board hopes Dangriga will soon undergo (Board, B. T. (2019, January).

As previously mentioned, we felt that the best course of action and the most effective way to consult with the Tourism Board in Dangriga, was to create a Business Internship program, which was essentially a crash course in all the things that make businesses, especially small businesses, successful. We broke the program down into 4 weeks and within those weeks had topics and then subcategories, where we were able to provide advice and resources for the microbusinesses associated with our program.

Business Basics

The first week consisted of a short survey that told us a little bit about their businesses and then had them start to brainstorm what they wanted us to help them with. We also gave them a brief overview of the plan for the next 4 weeks. When we got results back from the survey, we saw some common themes. Most people needed help with marketing and business presence. In addition to that most of the small business owners needed help creating and maintaining a financial plan and wanted to see some examples of loan writing. In addition to that we provided detailed instructions and videos of how to set up a free google account. We did this in order to give everyone participating access to the wealth of resources a google suite account provides.

The platform provides an auto save system that allows for all files to be conveniently stored in one place and has documents, sheets, forms and presentations. This creates ease of accessibility to all previous files and resources.

Business Plan

For this aspect of the program, we started off by giving them some general information and resources about small businesses¹. We gave them a link², which directs them to the Walton Business Writing website. This website provides a wealth of information on business writing and gives them guidelines on how to write many different types of business letters, proposals, loan applications, and financial plans. The website also provides examples that they can compare their own writing to.

Budget Template

Additionally, we believe that every successful business has a detailed budget plan that keeps track of the cash flow in and out of the business. So, we provided resources on how to create a budget plan^{3,4}. We explained that this helps you track your revenue and can be used to see if your business is growing. We warned them that every business is different, and explained they needed to understand that this template might not be a perfect fit for every business. However, we encouraged them to reach out with any questions or concerns they might have.

Finance

During this week we spend the whole week sending resources and examples of loan writing⁵. We again directed them to the Walton Communication Lab website, which had some great resources on how to do a write up for loans. We also offered up our time and advice if they wanted us to review any of their work. In addition to that we sent out resources to help small businesses get set up financially as well as how to crowdfund and how to use revenues and reinvest it back into the business^{6,7}. We also sent out a quick assignment on how to navigate the website to make sure this week was still interactive and not just an influx of information.

Marketing

To prepare for this week our team looked at the online presence of the small business in Dangriga. We looked up different businesses online and gave them a score based on how easy

¹ https://articles.bplans.com/a-standard-business-plan-outline/?utm_source=youtube&utm_medium=video&utm_term=business-plan&utm_content=What%20is%20a%20Business%20Plan%3F%20%231&utm_campaign=Bplans%20Explains%20Everything

² <https://walton.uark.edu/business-communication-lab/Resources/business-writing.php>

³ <https://www.pdfconverter.com/resources/blog/excel-templates-for-small-business-budget-management>

⁴ <https://templates.office.com/en-us/Business-expense-budget-TM04035489>

⁵ <https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/5954-smb-finance-management-tips.html>

⁶ https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_st_john_8_secrets_of_success#t-182927

⁷ <https://www.lendio.com/blog/small-business-tools/best-free-resources/>

they were to find online, accessibility or information, and their google rating. We have compiled a chart below to show the results of our findings. Though many companies did not have a great marketing presence, we understand that is greatly due to the lack of resources that many of these business owners face, so we found a few ways to help micro-business owners market themselves with little to no resources⁸.

Here is what we based on our rating system on:

TEMPLATE PAGE

Search Engine Optimization (If it appears in general Google search)

0- not at all 1- very little 2 - somewhat 3 - more so 4 - very much

Business Description (If the business lists important info like hours, contact information, menus etc. on specific search of the name)

0- not at all 1- very little 2 - somewhat 3 - more so 4 - very much

Media Presence (If the business presents high-quality pictures)

0- not at all 1- very little 2 - somewhat 3 - more so 4 - very much

Reaction of Audience to Business (If the business receives positive ratings)

0- not at all 1- very little 2 - somewhat 3 - more so 4 - very much

Map Presence (If the business is listed on Google Maps)

0- No 1- Yes

Rating Overall Results & Observations

* In this chart, we have only included business that came up in a Google search*

Place:	Rating	Observations
Mimi’s Ice Cream	16.5/17 = 97%	- Mimi’s is one of the very first search results on Google for

⁸ <https://smallbiztrends.com/2020/07/limited-marketing-resources.html>

		<p>ice cream in Dangriga. They could improve their presence by adding a clearer menu.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mimi's has got it together! There is an amazing online presence and great reviews!
Sunlight Restaurant	9.5/17 = 56%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is an online presence, but there is very little information beyond the basic requirements. There is only one picture and no menu or picture of the actual restaurant. - Sunlight is not one of the first results on Google and could improve their SEO. They could also add more pictures to their site.
O's Enterprise	10.5/ 17 = 62%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is very little information. It pops up and has a Facebook page, but it's not kept up and there are very few pictures of the product. - O's Enterprise has good reviews but could improve the number of pictures on their site and increase their SEO.
Steph's Mek Mi Plate Diner	13/17 = 77%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a good media presence with reviews, map presence, and a few pictures. I like that they show what the restaurant looks

		<p>like, but they need to add a menu and pics of the food.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The company has a good number of pictures and information on Google. They could improve their SEO.
Ej's Cool Spot	16/17 = 94%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This place has a great presence! They have updated a useful Facebook page with a menu, pictures of the restaurant, and a functioning website! They also have directions and great reviews.
Riverside Cafe	14/17 = 83%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good, but could be better. It has pictures of some food which is great, but it could have more. Also has a Facebook. - Riverside is doing well with their Google presence, although they could post more pictures of their food and a menu rather than pictures of the surrounding area.
Island Breeze Bar and Grill	17/17 = 100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This place is doing a great job! Really great presence, lots of pictures, lots of info but could add a menu - Island Bar and Grill is doing well on Google - lots of pictures and reviews! They could

		post a menu on the site.
Alexie Snack Shop	14.5/17 = 85%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They have a website with a bio about the place, map location, hours, and other important info. They could add some pics but overall, it is good! - This company is doing a great job with media and business information. They could improve their SEO a little more.
Tuani Garifuna	17/17 = 100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awesome job! More pictures would be great, but really an amazing job so far! - Tuani has an amazing presence on Google. They could improve by presenting a clearer picture of their menu.
King Burger Restaurant	14.5/17 - 95%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It has a pretty good presence, but it is not the only option that pops up. However, there are good pictures and information once you find the right website. - Lots of pictures of food and the menu! King Burger is doing a great job.
Wendy's Restaurant	10/17 = 56%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are tons of photos on TripAdvisor, which is great! But there is no map presence and no menus or anything.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wendy Restaurant has no pictures of their food/menu.
Da Grill Take Out	$0.5/17 = 3\%$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This company may no longer exist or could have changed names. - The name popped up on yellow pages with no information
Queen's Kitchen	$1/17 = 6\%$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I think I found it, but I am not sure, and you want that to be definite.
Mia's Deli	$8.5/17 = 50\%$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It comes up online but has very few pictures and almost no information. - Mia's Deli is on Google but needs more business information and pictures.
Letty's Kitchen	$8/17 = 47\%$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a map presence, and it comes up online but there is very little info and no pictures. - This business could add business information and photos.
Slaughterhouse Bar and Grill	$13.5/17 = 84\%$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good media presence with pictures and it has a phone number, address, and good reviews. However, they could add business hours and a menu. - Slaughterhouse is doing well but could add some more

		business info and a picture of their menu.
Bonefish	17/17 = 100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bonefish has hit all the bases when establishing their Google presence. They could improve their SEO to make it to the top of the list. - Awesome job! The whole first search page relates to the hotel, there is an address and number, as well as pictures! Overall, great job!
Pal's Guesthouse	16/17 = 94%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pal's has a great media and internet presence. They were the first thing to pop up when you search for "Pal's Guesthouse Dangriga." All the information you needed was right at your fingertips and easily accessible.
Chalenor Hotel	10/17 = 59%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - While the Chalenor Hotel does show up on an internet search they only appear on different lodging booking sites like Hotel.com and TripAdvisor. They don't have prices or a way to contact the hotel directly off an internet search.
D's Hostel & Laundry	4/17 = 82%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - D's shows up immediately when searched for on a

		<p>general web browser. They have contact information and pictures easily viewable and in a place that is very simple to find. Along with that D's has positive reviews in a place that is easily visible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall, a great job, the only area of improvement could be a more detailed description of the services and values.
Price is Right Grocery	15/17 = 88%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Price is Right Grocery Store shows up right away when googled and has a ton of business information available and easily accessible - The only area of improvement that I could find was to have more pictures and product listing available online
Best Buy Supermarket	10/17 = 59%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Location, contact information and description were the only things online. There were no reviews or pictures.
Dangriga Central Market	8/17 = 47%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I found some reviews of it online through trip advisor and also found it on Google maps showing the hours that it is open

		including some pictures. No dedicated Facebook page/website to be found.
Gas Station	15/17 = 88%	- There are a couple of gas stations in and around Dangriga, they all show up on maps. There is not much more information that is necessary.
Bus Stop	3/17 = 18%	- It does show up on maps which is important however it is difficult to find information about busses and fares online. I did find some general bus schedules after clicking through websites however they are not directly related to Dangriga.
St. Vincent Convenience Store	7/17 = 42%	- On maps and has a Facebook page however the Facebook page has not been used in recent years. Does not come up specifically for shopping in Dangriga.
Maggie & G's Clothing Shop	10/17 = 59%	- Facebook page with minimal posts and no information about how to find the store. They did have contact information and pictures of their products, but they did not have reviews or an address.

Kimberly Z's Clothing Shop	5/17 = 29%	- There was very little information about this business. The only information available was location and contact information.
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Sales Analysis

For this section of our project, we asked each business to evaluate themselves based on the following questions:

- o How do you reach your audience?
- o How do you get them to want to buy your product or service?
- o Why do they need your product?
- o What technology do you use?
- o Where is your business located?
- o What equipment do you need?

After answering the questions, we had each business evaluate if the methods they were using were proving efficient, and if they were inefficient, we asked them to reflect on why they were inefficient and how they could solve the problem in the future.

Market analysis

Additionally, we sent out two articles talking about how to market their businesses in their market space, and what consumers actually want from business owners. We felt like if they better understood the consumer, then they would be able to make the most of their market share and directly respond to what consumers want. ⁹

Advertising

Next, we had a crash course in all things digital marketing. Many businesses use Facebook as a main source of advertising and customer communication, but they do not keep their pages updated and they have a low social media presence. So, we sent resources about what market research says is the best way to update your Facebook page if you are a business owner and how often you need to update it¹⁰. We also supplied a resource on how to create google sites, since that is part of the Google Suite, they now have access to, and that might create a better SEO score as well as a more professional looking online presence¹¹. Finally, we tried to explain

⁹ <https://www.lendio.com/blog/small-business-tools/best-free-resources/>

¹⁰ <https://www.nickykriel.com/blog/social-media/facebook-tip-how-often-to-update-your-facebook-business-page/>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjsoX5Md4Y8>
<https://sites.google.com/a/amitybethany.com/howtocreteagooglewebsite/home>
<https://blog.hubspot.com/website/google-sites-tutorial>

the importance of SEO and how to create a better SEO score, because if they are trying to market towards tourists, but tourists cannot find their business online, then they will ultimately be unsuccessful in their future endeavors¹². Finally, we had them re-evaluate their SEO at the end of the week and decide if they were happy with their changes or if there were things they still need to improve on.

Final Feedback

During our last week, we had a final survey we sent out with questions that pertained to how well they thought we did at helping them find and apply resources, so that they can prosper in the future¹³. We also asked them to reach out to us with any questions, concerns, or advice so we could confidently close our internship knowing that we didn't leave anything unanswered.

Evaluation

Unfortunately, due to the nature of this whole program, many things did not go as planned. Since this was the first time completing this program virtually, there were quite a few hiccups in our original ideas. First and foremost, we had hoped this internship would be in person. However, after moving to remote, we learned that our partners in Belize were having issues setting up things on their end in a virtual environment. In addition to that, we had a program mentor in Belize who was new to her position, so we needed to wait for her to be fully integrated into their program and updated on their projects before she could work with us. Once we were able to connect with Rose, who was our program leader in Belize, we then had to adjust the project we were working on, because while they wanted us to consult with their Tourism Board, they no longer had many tourists due to the pandemic. So, instead we consulted with small businesses. While the pandemic caused some issues for us, there were also cultural differences that didn't allow our program to run as smoothly as we would have liked. For example, we had trouble getting people to respond to our check-ins or our emails. Most people would go several weeks without reading our emails or looking at our resources, which was slightly frustrating. Since the businesses had committed to our program, we assumed they would be avid participants, but that was not necessarily the case. The business culture of Belize and the societal culture is much more laid back and less formal than the United States, so when people did not respond to our emails, missed meetings without letting us know, or showed up to scheduled planning meetings late, it was much different than what I was expecting. The culture was also extremely informal. In many ways it was comforting. Many of the business owners knew each other well, and Rose was very close to all the small businesses. They all were part of a tight knit community, which you might not necessarily always see in a business setting. Personally, I am studying international business, so it was really beneficial to see a different business setting, because it is something that I have a vested interest in. Being able to grow by experiencing a different perspective and culture, even virtually, is something that I am grateful to have been able to do this summer. In the future, I could be working with people from completely

¹² <https://digitalagencynetwork.com/ways-to-build-a-strong-online-presence/>
<https://www.webfx.com/internet-marketing/improve-online-presence.html>

¹³

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScT2zXVfMP9DY3ln3HRlIbPwDkokVChu2LgHutzDwWP2FdJbQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

different backgrounds and cultures, and I feel like this program helped me understand that just because someone doesn't work the same way that I work, doesn't mean that it is wrong. They simply have a different perspective of business, and they potentially might have different priorities. Overall, I believe we achieved what we meant to accomplish, which was to create a wealth of resources for micro-business owners to be able to draw from and learn from. If we had more time, we all would have liked to meet with each business individually to have weekly consulting sessions to better track their progress. However, as previously mentioned this was difficult since many business owners didn't respond when we reached out to them to schedule meetings, or they were unable to meet during the day since they had jobs. Unfortunately, since many of them were working full time, they also did not want to meet after work hours, since many of them had other commitments, families, or additional responsibilities. We hope that we have created a sustainable program, so that next year another group can travel to Belize and see if any of the micro businesses were able to implement any of the suggestions and resources we provided.

Next steps

As far as next steps go, this program can be continued in the future, by continuing to do yearly check-ins with these businesses and offer consulting advice that can build on each other each year. Perhaps next Summer, students can work on setting up a consulting firm. This would be beneficial as it would provide the micro firms in Dangriga with a resource they could use even when University of Arkansas students are not there. The firm can offer advice and could be set up by students and then left in the hands of a capable citizen who might be interested in running that type of business. Additionally, this could also act as a digital consulting firm to help market the small businesses available in Dangriga, and potentially market Dangriga itself as a tourist destination and hub.

Conclusion

In the end I was happy with the results of this program and while it changes rapidly, it taught me how necessary it is to be flexible, patient, and understanding. This has been a difficult couple of years for everyone, all over the world. Adjusting and acting accordingly has been a huge challenge for me personally. However, I know that I will be able to apply what I have learned in this time to my future endeavors. The people of Dangriga were welcoming, knowledgeable, and kind in helping me learn about business in Dangriga and being exposed to their work environment helped me realize that the pace of work, the work environment, and the work/ life balance is different all around the world. If I hadn't learned how to accommodate those differences this past Summer, I know those differences would have posed challenges for me in the future. I am forever grateful to both the city of Dangriga, the wonderful people I worked with this Summer, the University of Arkansas, and especially Dr. Farmer for providing such an amazing experience that I know I will be able to draw on and grow from for the rest of my business career.

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