

Fridley Liquor Renovation is Overwhelmingly Successful

By Amy Felegy

From February of 2013 to November of 2014, Fridley Liquor transformed from an antiquated alcohol outlet to the contemporary store we know today. Wally Wysopal, Fridley city manager, explained the desperate need for the recent facelift. From steadily declining revenue to increased competition from Total Wine, protecting the business's vitality became ever-important. With impeccable timing, the renovation was overwhelmingly successful.

Kicking off the transformation meant speaking with neighboring city managers and finance directors to achieve the results Fridley Liquor sought after. **Delaney Consulting helped strategize a customer service model to differentiate them from other liquor stores. Creating a new logo and brand for the operation was a new process for both the store and the city, and such change did not come without its concerns.**

The city significantly relies on the liquor industry to financially stabilize the community. "[I] quickly realized how important the revenues from our liquor operation were to the city's operation," said Wysopal. In addition to boosting Fridley's financial health, emerging competition also ignited the transformational fire. "We knew we didn't have the ability to take on Total Wine in pricing... [but] we need[ed]... to keep the livelihood of the operation," said Wysopal. This new rivalry was certain to alter the competitive atmosphere, and Fridley Liquor managers knew they could not afford this continually decreasing revenue.

Kyle Birkholz, Fridley Liquor operations manager, described how drastically the building changed during the overhaul. "The whole building was run-down. The interior of the store had been the same for 16 years... Now, everything looks

new again. You drive by... [and] you wouldn't realize this building has been here since [the 1960s]."

Also new to the establishment is a mission statement, logo, spokesperson, Fred Lee, and more open communication to community members. "We've been more articulate in our budgeting to show exactly what the money is going into," such as park and capital equipment funds, said Wysopal. "[We have been] more specific about how the liquor operation benefits the city." This helped publicize benefits of shopping at Fridley Liquor.

Fridley finance director Shelly Peterson explained how new informational posters highlighted where "their dollars are going... Back into the community." Peterson described changes within the employee sector as well. New supervisor training, employee engagement strategies, and team collaboration software tools all emerged from the transformation.

"The liquor operation really had to feel like it was a part of the city operation," said Wysopal. We want [employees] to... sense that what they are doing is every bit as important as what police... fire, and public works are doing."

The success of the operation can be attributed to the timing of nearby development. The Fridley Market was gaining prominence through Duluth Trading, Teppanyaki Grill, and Cub Foods, which increased the area's retail environment and helped Fridley Liquor grow financially.

At the same time, the surrounding circumstances proved to be difficult for the business as well. It was challenging to understand the condition of Fridley Liquor among their own building's renovation, in addition to the shopping center's. Without the identifiable

exterior of Fridley Liquor, many community members believed the business was closed. 18 months of construction traffic and only two days of closed doors were significant obstacles, but when remodeling ended the customer base saw an extreme upsurge.

"People used to just come in, grab what they want, and leave. Now, people want to shop for liquor. They'll spend 20 minutes to an hour in here looking at all of the different craft beers," said Birkholz.

Aiming to curb competition, increase financial revenue, and include Fridley Liquor employees in the municipal process, it can be agreed that the overall renovation was triumphant. **The company has already seen a 30 to 40% increase in the number of customers coming through the doors.**

"It's tough when you're going through the construction and remodel," said Birkholz. "You think going into it, 'is it going to be worth it?'" **With the results as evidence, the answer remains an undeniable 'yes'.**

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