



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

ROBERT H. SMITH SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

CENTER FOR SOCIAL VALUE CREATION

PALS

An Initiative of the National Center for Smart Growth
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**COMMUNITY
FORKLIFT**



**Partnership for
Action Learning
in Sustainability**

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Impact Consulting Fellowship
Fall 2023 Strategic Recommendations



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Introduction

Our team is pleased to submit the following work and believe it can be successful for the client, Community Forklift. During this Impact Consulting Fellowship (ICF), we found many challenges as our team learned how to work together, create tasks, and proactively engage in the project. Our work doesn't offer the detail we would have liked, but we believe it offers inspiration and frameworks for continued use, either by Community Forklift or through another iteration of the ICF.

This paper supplements the power point presentation with greater detail regarding decisions, thought process, the potential for implementation, and other items. We focused on three topics, but business operations are interconnected, and we've tried to capture that here.

We approached the project and paper in the following parts: Business Processes, Marketing Analysis, Financial Analysis, and Next Steps. The pertinent part of the thesis is highlighted in each section to better tell the story.



Overview

Executive Summary

A visit to the Community Forklift warehouse, allowed us to view operational processes and bottlenecks, and social media and advertising data, our team has the following suggestions to meet Community Forklift's goals to boost revenue, increase consumer base, engage the community, donate items away, and help keep items out of the landfill by finding them new homes.

Community Forklift has a unique spirit, and we believe people will want to be part of an organization with a great mission, acting to make a difference. We believe Community Forklift is a great cause and our suggestions aim for smoother and more effective ways to meet the mission.

Operational Goal

To make Community Forklift a re-use powerhouse and help lead the reuse and waste management conversation in the DMV.

Strategic Thesis

An organized warehouse that can handle intake, that proactively engages and partners with others, and that prices well will lead the charge that enables the DMV to become a hero of reuse and waste management.



Business Processes

“An organized warehouse that can handle intake...”

Intake

Intake is central to Community Forklift’s operations. In interviews with the crew, we found leadership and guidance is often conflicted. People are asked to do one thing and are then given a different task by someone else. This is confusing and taxing on everyone. Time is wasted walking around and focus is lost switching jobs.

Intake could be better handled by limiting donation to specific times. This will help the crew focus on meaningful and specific tasks and reduce wasted labor hours and confusion.

A focused intake crew can ensure a greater flow, organization, and control of the intake process. People are used to bringing stuff at their convenience, but the Forklift’s work is good and asking the public to support it by donating during the certain hours is a reasonable request.

There is a concern that restricted hours will lead to fewer donations and more material in the landfill. While the number of sellable items and discarded items varies, we believe there are too many bottlenecks that interrupt sales to be accepting anything and everything. We also believe that customers who donate items will understand and work with the situation. They might also



reflect on whether they really need to donate. Fewer donations could give Community Forklift extra time and space to focus on the warehouse.”

Boundaries can create a healthy process. There are so many items in the warehouse that are slowing down operations and potential sales; we think more time to process it will help meet the mission of finding them new homes.

Warehouse Organization

From the survey, warehouse cleanliness and organization is an issue.

Figure 1: Survey Results



Some customers like the mystery of getting lost and exploring while others don't. Some don't mind untidiness and others say, "clean it up!". It would be good to find a balance.

Using the hours gained from reduced donation hours, an effort to organize and clean is possible. This could include dusting, organizing sections by size, or giving trendier items more visibility. Community Forklift isn't Home Depot, but cleanliness and organization could contribute to a good reputation and pleasant customer experience. It also brings the benefit of a high level of



consistent attention. When done in an organized way, it helps keep staff and crew organized and tuned into the warehouse's needs.

Pricing Visibility

In the warehouse some price tags are missing or hard to see, and with a closer look, the price is often partially blocked making it hard to tell what the price. We suggest new, more legible price tags.

Marketing Analysis

“...that proactively engages and partners with others...”

Community Forklift seeks to live its mission—low cost, donation-based, uniting the community, limited landfill use—we believe a strong social media and marketing campaign would get the word out and build partners.

The mission is to help the community, not necessarily to get rich. We've formulated suggestions accordingly.

Proactive Engagement

Engagement generates customers and donations. The current clientele learn about Community Forklift through word of mouth and some newsletters, but rarely through events or social media. So, you need to go out personally.

Community Forklift already partners with several organizations and these connections can be extended.



We suggest Community Forklift distributes the developed flier (see below) in a 15-mile radius. Fliers can be handed out in neighborhoods as well as large and small businesses. In marketing, it is typical to have a target audience but

given the mission, vision, and number of items available, we think spreading the word far and wide is appropriate.

A personal connection can garner support and business as you speak directly with potential customers. The flier showcases what you sell and the types of people who might be interested. It also includes the other provided services such as the HELP program, Community Building Blocks, Education and Outreach, and Collecting Donations. A QR code will direct the scanner to a LinkedTree that has social media handles, making it more convenient for those interested in your work to access all your content.

Flier Campaign

Community Forklift should consider an open house event (with food and drink) to kick-off the marketing effort. From there you can sign-up volunteers to deliver the flier in the 15-mile radius and spread the word.

Figure 2: Proposed Flier



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COMMUNITY FORKLIFT

A PLACE FOR ALL TO SHOP

HOMEOWNERS

BUILDERS

CONTRACTORS

DIY ENTHUSIASTS

ANTIQUÉ COLLECTORS

Revamp Your Space with Community Forklift -
Where Every Find is a Green Treasure!

A Non-Profit Reuse Center for Home Improvement
Find What You Need at Affordable Prices!



DISCOUNTS

Take advantage of weekly discounts on lighting, decorations, appliances, and more!

ANTIQUES

Whether you're a seasoned collector or a curious new comer, our collection promises discovery and delight.



DIVERSE SUPPLIES

Explore the more than 30 different categories of products offered, ranging from furnishing to lumber and everything in between!

VISIT US!

4671 Tanglewood Dr.
Edmonston, MD 20781
Mon-Fri: 12pm to 5pm
Weekends: 10am to 5pm

CONTACT US!

(301) 985-5180
Info@CommunityForklift.org





WHAT WE DO



Our Mission :

To make new and gently used building materials and home essentials available to the community at low cost, distribute free materials to nonprofits and neighbors in need, create good green jobs, and educate the public about reuse.

WE DO THIS THROUGH:

Home Essentials Program (HELP)

Provide free building materials and home essentials to households with limited resources.



Community Building Blocks (CBB)

Give store credit mini-grants to community groups and nonprofits for projects that help the community.

Education and Outreach

Educate the community on reuse through staff development, warehouse tours, workshops, outreach at events, and DIY social media reels.



Collect Donations!

Support our community reuse nonprofit by donating building materials, funds, or a vehicle. Turn waste into resources!



Social Media

To grow the brand and generate engagement on social media, Community Forklift should focus on appealing to followers' emotions. For example, instead of posting about a chair, make the post about someone using the chair in multiple ways (showing versatility). It's important to show the followers what can be done with the products that Community Forklift offers.

Community Forklift could also use AI-generated voice-overs for video reels (much more engaging than picture posts) with catchy hooks to "reel" in potential customers. The 30- to 60-second reels would consist of educational content that keeps users engaged the entire time. We've developed a sample reel to illustrate.

Other social media tools such as TIK TOK can also be used. Reaching out to content creators who post on sustainable living, zero-waste, or DIY projects living will bring more traction to social media and, by extension, to the webpage. This effort will reach a new age demographic and lead more people to know about community forklift.

Efforts should target each generation with content to get them in the door, to the online store, or to pass the word along. The content that may not drive customers right away but still create a healthy and fun mindscape to "check out Community Forklift later." That's part of the bigger picture—to get the word out that Community Forklift exists and to build enough trust so that people start going there for their needs!



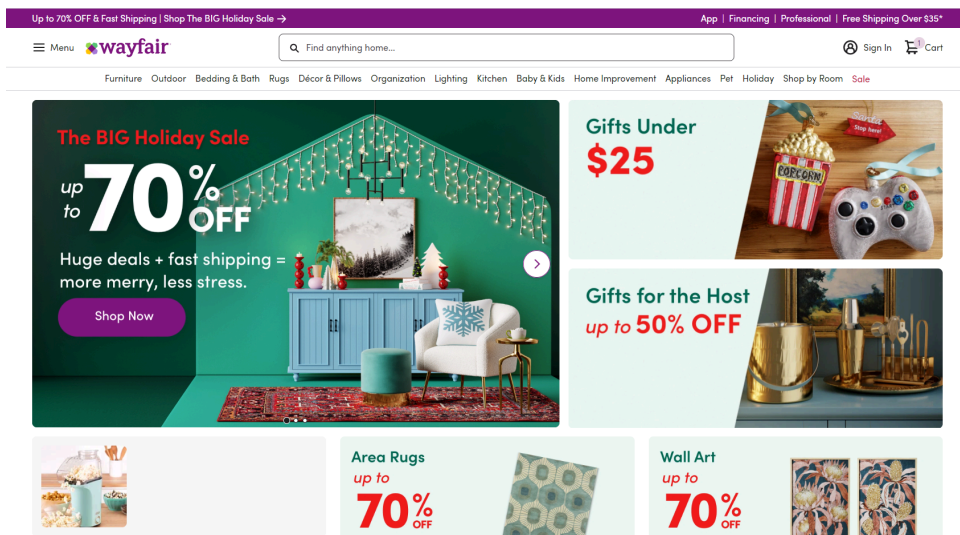
Website

As Community Forklift hands out fliers and increases its social media presence, the website should be smooth and easy to use.

Increasing the site's SEO searchability can help target a younger generation of customers. This may not be a huge area of concern, but it is hard to find the warehouse through Google searches, perhaps because it's advertised as a "Reuse Warehouse." General building material terms should be used to reach builders and other buyers. For example, my uber driver has a business used building and car parts to Africa. He was surprised when I told him that Community Forklift was a reuse warehouse. I don't how he searches for products, but that he didn't know the warehouse existed was troubling!

A website revamp should start with the landing page. Rather than featuring the mission statement visitors should land on an engaging home page.

Figure 3: Sample Home Page



This Wayfair landing page is eye-catching and succinct while maintaining the categories along the top. A similar approach for Community Forklift will engage new users who will enjoy seeing products, categories, and discounts. Online shoppers don't like to think much and stay longer when the "eye-candy" is upfront. The mission statement should be included, but farther down the page.

The helpful shopping information should appear left to right. Instead of "Donate" on the left, users should see "Shop," "Programs," "News & Press," and "Events." Users will find the "About," "Donate," and "FAQ" sections to the right.

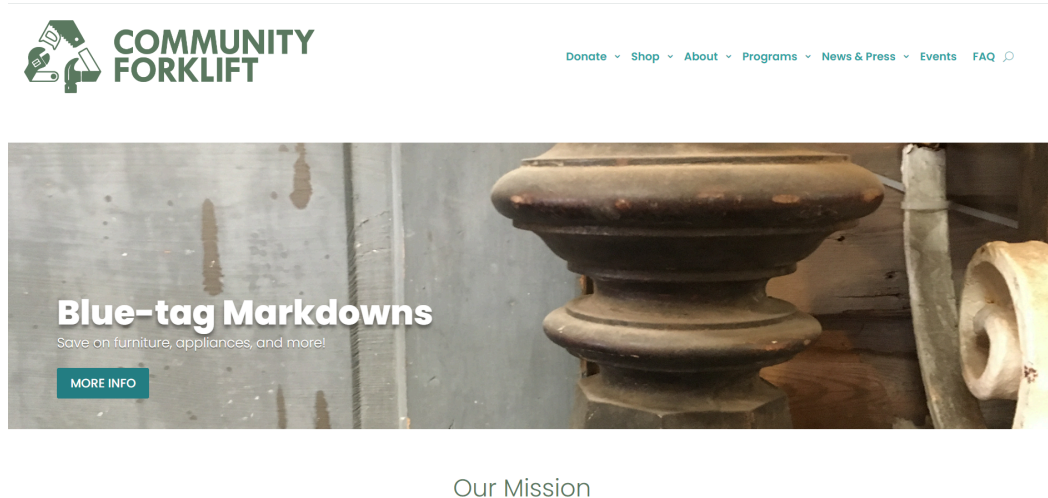
The general shopping categories should be immediately visible. They are clear on the online shop page, but they should have a similar prominence on the home page to draw customers into the store. The less work shoppers must do to find a product (we are a consumer society), the better. Once people are intrigued by the products, they'll want to know more about the mission of Community Forklift and how they can get involved.

Figure 4: Community Forklift Online Shopping Page

Home Amazon Paint Appliances Architectural Salvage Bathroom Fixtures & Plumbing Cabinet Sets
Doors & Windows Furniture Hardware & Tools Home Décor & More Lighting Treincarnation
Community Forklift Merch



Figure 5: Community Forklift, Current Landing Page



Financial Analysis

“...that prices well...”

Pricing

Community Forklift should examine its pricing. In the survey, many respondents thought the pricing was okay (“On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with the pricing of products at Community Forklift?”). But on further review, 155 of 309 respondents said “Overpriced products for a reuse warehouse” (“Do you experience the following from Community Forklift?”).

Figure 6: Survey Response About Pricing





Many said their budget and the prices were prohibitive factors in making a purchase (“Is there anything that deters you from making purchases at Community Forklift? Online or In Store”). As a reuse warehouse whose

mission is to sell at low cost, donate to those in need, and keep items out of the landfill, the survey indicates that lowering the prices is a must! Pricing for some items could be lower, and Community Forklift could offer options like price matching, haggling, auctions, and weekly discounts to increase sales and keep items out of the landfill.

Many stores offer price matching and haggling to undercut their competition and get customers in the door. Given the reuse mission, because all offered goods are donated, and the competition is the Salvation Army, Facebook Marketplace, and other reuse outlets, there is room for shoppers to ask for a price match or haggle to a reasonable extent.

This could start a cascade effect where everyone tried to price match or haggle on everything but selling a piece of furniture \$50 dollars less to make a sale at \$300 instead of \$350, would build encourage customers to return for more deals. Strong negotiation skills are essential for this to work and to keep the pricing system from coming apart, but given the spirit of Community Forklift, selling at low cost to meet customer needs is worth it. This is an opportunity for the crew to study market demand and estimate value. Again, the warehouse has a bottleneck of items in the warehouse and the goal is to find them homes.

The Salvation Army holds auctions, which encourage customers to buy, and Community Forklift could do the same. We’re not sure what items should be



auctioned, how, or when, but it's an idea that will attract more traffic to the store and online.

Everyone loves a happy hour discount—cheap beer, food, and fun. Community Forklift could offer the same fun but with building materials. For example, a weekly discount could lessen the overstock of doors and windows. A survey respondent suggested senior discounts, an idea worth exploring. Discounts can be advertised in the newsletter, but we suggest advertising on the front of the building as well.

Gift with Purchase

Community Forklift receives all its items (except paint) through donation and with a bottleneck of stock, it could create a giving system. Simply giving items away but not entirely for free. A gift with purchase program could attract customers and move stock.

For instance, spend \$15, and choose an item from section A for free. Spend \$35, section B, or \$75, section C. This offer is based on Amazon's model of free shipping at a certain spending level. This could direct hundreds of items to homes as well as increase interest to shop at Community Forklift. Items could range from inexpensive, a box of nails or even a painting. This is very much in line with Community Forklift's giving spirit and would grow the brand and trust in the community.



Enabling the Hero

“...will lead the charge that enables the DMV to become the hero of reuse and waste management.”

We believe that the ideas described above can publicize Community Forklift allowing it to impact more people. Part of the publicity should be a narrative of the importance of keeping items out of the landfill and how donating to and purchasing from Community Forklift serves the local community as well as the DMV.

Next Steps

Community Forklift should partner again with the Center for Social Value Creation to implement SEO search results, launch an ad campaign, work with an influencer, develop a new sales position for social media content. It should also consider devoting Bay 3 to intake, and monitoring ROIs on those items.

Community Forklift should also create a financial model to capture real ROIs, to track in store and online selling potential changes. If it pursues another stint with the ICF, the new team should include:

- Financial analyst (to determine ROIs)
- Architect (to design the warehouse bay layout)
- Marketer (to work with influencer and develop social media)



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- Graphic designer (to design a consistent website, flier, etc.)
- Event planner (to increase community involvement)
- Team lead (to guide the project).

Thank you for working with us on this consulting project. Your responsiveness to emails and prompt answers to questions made this project a pleasure. We hope our work can help Community Forklift move forward as a great reuse warehouse. We look forward to working with you again with the Center for Social Value Creation.

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Center For Social Value Creation, Impact Consulting Fellow (ICF)