

UBC Social Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Sustainability  
Program  
Student Research Report

**Sprouts: A case study in the marketing of student-run food cafés**

**Karan Khaira, Matthew Godinez, Madelaine Anderson, Anna Baumgartel, Caroline**

**Ramsay**

**University of British Columbia**

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## **1. Executive Summary**

Sprouts is a student-run café which provides socially-conscious, local, and organic food to the UBC community. Sustainability is central to the Sprouts business model and distinguishes it among the many food providers on campus. Unfortunately, Sprouts has seen a dramatic decrease in sales after it had to relocate from the Student Union Building to its current Nest location. This temporary location has less foot traffic and visibility. In addition, there is no longer a marketing position on the Sprouts' Board of Directors. Social media is a powerful marketing tool to increase sales and brand awareness. Therefore, we aimed to improve Sprouts' marketing strategy to increase its customer base. We conducted a literature review to learn about the marketing industry's current techniques and consulted members of the Sprouts Executive Board who also provided us with annual transition reports. These reports include insights, ideas, and accounts of failures to inform the incoming board members at the beginning of the new academic year. Finally, we designed social media posts, post templates, and a social media calendar. This calendar describes relevant events, holidays, and hashtags that Sprouts can use in their social media, thus engaging in relevant online conversations and increasing brand exposure. We also created conventional materials, such as a stamp card, posters and a large standing banner. We made a variety of recommendations, ranging from investigating new design programs, to considering additional social media platforms. Overall, the Sprouts Board members have great potential to share their enthusiasm for sustainable food through marketing, increasing sales in the process.

## 2. Introduction

This project is in collaboration with Sprouts, a non-profit student volunteer-run café on the campus of the University of British Columbia (UBC). Sprouts offers fair-trade, local, organic food to the campus at affordable prices, contributing to campus food security and sustainability (Sprouts Who Are We n.d.). Sprouts offer a wide range of services such as educational workshops, a weekly lunch by donation, and a Community Shared Agriculture program called the Sprouts Box (Sprouts Who Are We n.d.). The Sprouts Box provides customers with boxes of seasonal, fresh produce weekly. This is Sprouts' most successful and lucrative program.

Despite these valuable and sustainable services, Sprouts is not reaching its potential in terms of revenue. Many students are unaware of Sprouts' unique services. In addition, Sprouts lost many customers as a result of a temporary move from the Student Union Building to the Nest to a location that is difficult to find (Appendix A). We believe that additional marketing efforts will increase revenue, as well as increase food system sustainability at UBC.

Sprouts aims to provide students with organic, local, and fair trade food, while acting as an educational platform about food sustainability (Sprouts Who Are We n.d.). The overall sustainability of Sprouts is reflected in its values, which include making local, organic, and fair trade foods accessible to students on campus, increasing awareness of the UBC Farm and other local sustainable farms, and operating a business that is socially ethical. These values form the foundation of the purchasing policy. The Sprouts' Board of Directors uses the purchasing policy to consider factors such as product origin

and growing methods, processing location, processing procedures, cost, amount of packaging, and company business model (Sprouts Who Are We n.d.). The Board also considers questions such as acceptability by consumers with vegan, gluten-free, or other restricted diets. This critical evaluation of products contributes to the sustainability of the campus food system. Sprouts guarantees that their produce is grown within British Columbia (BC) or in the northern part of Washington State. By doing so, they support local farms and reduce food transportation distances. Sprouts' Community Eats program contributes to campus social sustainability. Every Friday, volunteers prepare a by-donation meal. Students from all faculties come together for lunch made from locally-sourced ingredients. Overall, Sprouts provides a space where people can enjoy food that meets the social, economic and environmental sustainability vision of UBC. Information about their purchasing policy, initiatives, and belief statements were found on their website, [www.sprouts.ubc.ca](http://www.sprouts.ubc.ca).

Access to local food contributes to food sustainability in several ways. Local food systems increase food security, rejuvenate an interest in food preparation from raw ingredients, and contribute to a move away from processed food (Snider 2008). Restaurants can also contribute to food sustainability by purchasing local food. Restaurants can educate and influence consumers by highlighting local ingredients on their menus, which raises awareness of local food. This also provides revenue streams for local businesses and farms (Snider 2008).

Many small businesses use social media platforms, like Facebook and LinkedIn, to promote their products or services (Lacho and Marinello 2010). Social networking can be a useful form of social media marketing. Facebook is a social networking tool

relevant to our study since Sprouts already has a Facebook account. Social networks such as Facebook facilitate the formation of online communities, which can be helpful in the university setting where many people come from different backgrounds. Social media users can offer their review of a business and influence other users (Lacho and Marinello 2010).

Social media can be a quick, low-cost, direct way for nutrition educators to broaden the scope of their targeted programs. Considering the style of marketing, Fox and Longart (2016) found that social media posts that were considered explicitly promotional were not successful and did not have the intended effect. Engaging the audience, posts with a personal touch, and building relationships are an effective ways to spread electronic word of mouth and avoid overt advertising material (Fox and Longart, 2016). Social media marketing must be engaging and interactive while still advertising the restaurant, however this balance is hard to find (Fox and Longart, 2016). Fox and Longart (2016) also suggest to engage with potential customers through social media and spread electronic word of mouth through competition, although not in excess, interesting posts that are original, avoiding repetitiveness and predictability. Students tend to favour the speed of service and low cost food which can be an area for marketing (Josiam et al., 2014). Selling ticket books could also be a way to market the business, it can be cheaper for the student and potentially increase patronage (Josiam et al., 2014).

Many small business owners who use social media marketing worry about digital security and poor interactions with other social media users. Platforms with applications that require access to the business' private information (email, phone numbers) could

be a potential security threat (Lacho and Marinello 2010). While having access to a huge number of potential customers online can be an asset, it can also be a poor use of a business' resources if the platform's users are not interested in the product or service (Lacho and Marinello 2010).

Sprouts has been the topic of several SEEDS reports, which were useful to inform our research. Sprouts needed to increase communication with their customers, (Sawin et al. 2010) and improve its social sustainability (Wang et al. 2009). Sprouts has a presence on multiple social media platforms, including Instagram and Facebook. However, posts on these platforms are not the responsibility of a specific person. Members of the Executive Board generate content whenever they have time (Personal Communication, Meryn Corkery, January 18 2017). Sprouts Board members can use social media accounts to increase student awareness and support their sustainability goals. Posts can help promote Sprouts' mission of increasing awareness of local food producers practicing sustainable farming techniques, making local, organic, and fair-trade foods accessible to the UBC community, and creating educational opportunities around sustainable food systems (Sprouts Who Are We n.d.).

The goal of this project was to provide Sprouts with marketing tools to increase student engagement and its customer base. Increasing the customer base will contribute to the café's economic sustainability and social agenda. We propose a long-term marketing plan that is adaptable to the fluctuating realm of social media and easily adopted by new Board members when they start their annual position. We designed social media posts, post templates, and a social media calendar. This calendar describes relevant events, holidays, and hashtags that Sprouts can use in their social

media, thus engaging in relevant online conversations and increasing brand exposure. We also created conventional materials, such as a stamp card, posters and a large standing banner. We made a wide variety of recommendations, ranging from investigating new design programs, to considering additional social media platforms. Additionally, we propose decreasing the uncertainty associated with the annual change in management due to the yearly renewal of Board members.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Literature Review*

We conducted a literature review to identify the importance of social and physical media in advertising. We researched methods connecting customers to small or student-run businesses through social media. We searched keywords such as “social media strategy small business” and “student run business models”. We researched topics including the frequency and content of posts including how to post regularly while not seeming explicitly promotional. Sources of information included peer reviewed journals, previous SEEDs projects with Sprouts, and documents from public agencies. We also examined current social media strategies from different companies. Due to unique goals of Sprouts, this literature review focuses on three main areas: the importance of local food, marketing with an emphasis on social media and student run businesses.



### *3.2. Interviews with Sprouts' Executive Board Members*

All 21 members of the Board were contacted through Meryn Corkery, Sprouts' store coordinator, and we met in person with those who expressed interest in social media on Thursday, February 2, 2017. We asked for information on Sprouts' current and future social media presence.

### *3.3. Create Social Media Calendar, Posts and preliminary testing*

Meryn Corkery provided us with Sprouts' transition reports from previous years. These reports are created at the end of each academic year by the Executive Board to summarize the accomplishments, identify challenges, and provide recommendations for the new Board members who will take over the governance of Sprouts in the following academic year. These reports ensure continuity and transmission of knowledge because the members of the Board are only appointed for one year. We reviewed the reports for key insights into their previous marketing attempts including previous social media strategies, ideas for future posts and suggestions for timing of posts since the 2015-2016 Board had reflected on what had worked well for them in the past.

### *3.4. Sprouts Website*

We examined Sprouts' website ([www.ubcsprouts.ca](http://www.ubcsprouts.ca)) to see what form of marketing was already available on the 'About', 'Learn More', 'Initiatives' and 'Get Involved' webpages.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Digital Marketing Material

We created digital marketing materials that can be used on both on Instagram and Facebook accounts which Sprouts currently uses. The materials are in the form of photo posts that advertise services, events, ongoing promotions and workshops (Fig. 1).

Our posts invoke curiosity as recommended by Fox and Longart (2016), but still contain enough information for the viewer to understand what is being advertised. For example, a post to recruit volunteers shows the benefits of working at Sprouts and provides contact information should an individual find interest in volunteering (Fig. 2). Other posts act as clear reminders of events (Fig. 2).



Figure 1. Instagram post for promoting a Sprouts Box. A Sprouts Box is Sprouts' version of a Community Shared Agriculture box.



Figure 2. Instagram posts to promote student engagement. The left photo shows a volunteer recruitment post. On the right, the photo shows a 'Community Eats' event promotion post.

We monitored the public response of three of our posts which were released on Sprouts' Instagram account. A promotional post offered a 15% off discount on customers' next purchases if they would post pictures of their Sprouts meal on Instagram and use #vegancave. This post was shared on February 10, 2017 and received about 32 likes in one week (Fig. 3). Since the initiation of the hashtag, 11 Instagram users have posted photos with the tag and redeemed their prize. A post announcing that credit cards were accepted was shared on March 27, 2017, and received 30 likes in one week (Fig. 3). A post advertising the Community Eats event was released March 16, 2017 and received 31 likes in one week. These three posts received an average of 31 "likes" per week.

We also created posts that would relate to special days relevant to Sprouts (Table 1). For example, a World Food Day post (Fig. 4) can be shared around October

16th (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, n.d.). All additional posts can be seen in Appendix B. In addition, we have listed a set of most used hashtags corresponding to each special day (Fig. 5). We provided the Board Members with Photoshop post templates that are easy to edit. These templates should give Sprouts Board members a head start for the 2017/2018 school year.



Figure 3. Posts shared on Instagram in February and March 2017. Left: promotion post. Right: information post.



Figure 4. Example of a special day post that Sprouts can share. This post is for World Food Day and can be used each year around October 16.

Table 1. List of holidays and notable dates for special days relevant for Sprouts.

Holiday	Date	Holiday	Date
Canada Organic Week	Last week of September	Remembrance Day	November 11
International Vegetarian Day	October 1	National Chocolate Brownie Day	December 8
International Coffee Day	October 1	National Tea Day	December 15
Thanksgiving	Second Monday in October	Winter break	Late December
National Dessert Day	October 14	Agriculture Day	February 16
Waste Reduction Week	3 <sup>rd</sup> week of October	Exam hours	Mid April
Halloween	October 31	Closing for summer	Late April
International Vegan day	November 1		

September

Week	Action
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Back to school posts                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ #backtoschool #school</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Advertise Sprouts Box (DEADLINE),</li> <li>• Recruit volunteers</li> <li>• Community Eats                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ #vegan #social #college #community #food #vegancave #foodie #veganlife #veganlove #eatplants #veganfoodie #protein #foodforthought #food4thought #UBCsprouts #sprouts</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

October

Week	Action
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International vegetarian day October 1st                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ #vegetarianday #vegetarianfood #vegetarian</li> </ul> </li> <li>• International Coffee Day October                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ #coffee #cocoa #coffeeday #coffeetime #vegancave #vegan #UBC #Canada #international #UBCsprouts #sprouts #earth #world</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Community Eats</li> </ul>

Figure 5. Examples of hashtags to be used according to the academic calendar. The circle shows the hashtags that Sprouts could use for Community Eats. The October calendar shows potential special holidays like International Vegetarian Day.

#### 4.2 Conventional Marketing Material

The conventional marketing material for Sprouts includes designs for future posters and banners, stamp cards, and catering business cards. We were able to produce one full-size stand-up roll-up banner (Fig. 6). Other posters and banners are in digital form (Appendix C). We created “Buy 10 Get 1 Free” stamp card designs for Sprouts’ main dishes and business cards to advertise their catering services. (Fig. 7).

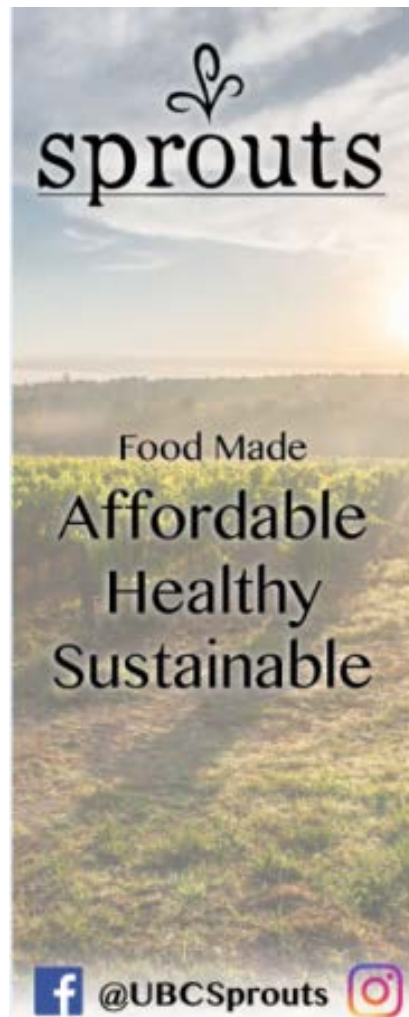


Figure 6. Sprouts banner made from Vancouver Banners.



Figure 7. Design of conventional marketing material. Left: stew stamp card design “Buy 10 Get 1 Stew Free”. Right: catering info cards for people to contact Sprouts about catering options on the right.

#### 4.3 Other Material

The website of Sprouts has pages which are or could be helpful to their customers. The Mission Statement and Purchasing Policy are informative. The calendar of events, if updated, could be helpful for people who want a list of upcoming workshops, community events and other club activities.

### 5. Discussion

Social media is relatively new to marketing, and continues to change through evolving platforms. We believe that the use of social media pages will enhance Sprouts' revenues. Sprouts must increase sales as they often do not have the overhead to purchase the necessary supplies to satisfy the demand for their products (Corkery 2017). As a result, selling out of food before 2 pm occurs regularly, triggers complaints

from customers and affects profit (Corkery 2017). Since Sprouts sells at affordable prices, the number of customers served daily is crucial to generate sufficient income for operations to be efficient.

Consumers can help generate new business and promote or assist any brand through tweeting, blogging, reviewing, or following on social media platforms. Loyal “followers” can generate online marketing via a virtual word-of-mouth marketing method, which can become vital to the success of a business (Hassan et al. 2015).

In addition to exposure, Reyneke et al. (2011) find that the relationship a business has with consumers can be used as a tool for their loyal followers to propel and support marketing strategies. For example, advertising the weekly ‘Community Eats’ event with our designs, can increase traffic in the cafe and is a valuable opportunity to promote events, services, and café products. Sprouts can help expand their network by making their current customers marketing agents by advertising offers to existing patrons if they bring friends to the store.

Many small businesses are still unaware of the potentials of social media marketing for advertisement and data collection (Hassan et al. 2015). Sprouts has yet to connect their Facebook and Instagram accounts which offer analytical tools allowing Sprouts to monitor feedback for each post. This feedback would allow Sprouts’ Board members to properly tailor their posts to meet their demographics interests, and then further focusing on that style. Based on guidance offered to small businesses in using social media, Sprouts Board members should be able to use Instagram and Facebook to connect with customers at lower costs and higher efficiency than other traditional communication tools (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) and to monitor what is being said



about their services (Reyneke, Pitt, and Berthon, 2011). Board members should keep in mind the Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action (AIDA) (Hassan et al. 2015). According to Barry and Howard, as cited in Heath and Feldwick (2007), the AIDA model contains a four-step formula to get attention, attract interest, create desire, and then take action, which is making a purchase. Based on AIDA guidelines, Board members should be providing full details of services provided at Sprouts to minimize lost sales due to confusion or lack of awareness. Providing these details should translate into attracting interest and, creating a desire and resulting in the consumer taking action in the form of a purchase.

## **6. Recommendations**

We recommend that Sprouts Board Members connect the café's Instagram and Facebook accounts. Since the purchase of Instagram by Facebook, Facebook offers several benefits if both accounts are linked. One benefit includes access to analytical tools to evaluate the success of each post. Furthermore, connecting the accounts would allow Sprouts to pay to promote posts on both platforms at no additional cost, and makes for easier cross posting. Such strategies may increase brand awareness and potentially sales.

We suggest that Sprouts Board members monitor the feedback of the posts and adapt accordingly. Our group has designed many different types of posts to advertise, celebrate, and occasionally entertain. It is important to see what is being preferred or "liked" by the followers and focus more attention to that particular style.

The events calendar at [ubcsprouts.ca](http://ubcsprouts.ca) needs to include every event hosted by Sprouts. The Facebook account already has a list of the events, therefore our group suggests that Sprouts Board Members transfer the events to their primary website as well. Potential customers may use Google to find information on the cafe, making the Sprouts website a key source of information. We also recommend that Sprouts Board members advertise 'Community Eats' as a Facebook Calendar event every Friday. Only five of these weekly events were advertised for the entire 2016-2017 school year. This way, Facebook users can download location and date information into their phone's maps and calendar applications. Users can also digitally RSVP to the event, allowing Sprouts to estimate attendance and the amount of food to prepare.

We used Adobe Photoshop to create every design file for Sprouts, all of which can be easily modified and treated like templates to promote brand continuity. For \$10 USD a month Adobe Creative Cloud subscribers receive Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Lightroom products, both of which are great for graphic design (Adobe 2017). Since Sprouts is only open for eight months of the year, the yearly cost only amounts to \$80 USD. This program is the industry standard for design work, and we highly recommend that Sprouts subscribes to it. Its .psd file format is well accepted by all professional printing stores and helps to ensure the highest quality results for print and digital media.

In addition to Photoshop, Adobe also offers a free online design application called Adobe Spark. This program allows users to create digital content through a drag and drop system that is easy to use. The online program also allows users to import their own photos or use ready-made templates. The program is also able to resize the

images quickly, and has varying fonts and colour palettes available. However, because of the simplicity, it lacks some of the advanced features of other programs.

Consistency and continuity are key for branding. Reinstating the position for a Board member in charge of social media is necessary to ensure proper marketing. We suggest that individuals bidding for the role, once the position has been reinstated, have access to the Adobe programs and/or possess prior experience using them. If and when the role is reprised, Sprouts Board members should reconsider using the Twitter account that has been inactive since 2014. Due to its popularity and ease in creating direct conversations, Twitter can help locate potential customers, engage in discussions about food sustainability, and announce events. Sprouts could also engage with other sustainability groups on campus. One potential barrier to using Twitter is the additional time commitment since a successful twitter account would require Sprouts Board members to be very active to facilitate interesting conversations. In comparison, the time required to post an image simultaneously on Facebook and Instagram with a few words is minimal. These differences should be considered seriously by whoever fills the social media position on the Sprouts Board in the future.

Snapchat is another platform which Sprouts could consider since it is a social media tool that can increase business. Snapchat uses geofilters, which are overlaying graphics that users can add to their “snaps” which are photos taken with the application using automatic branding (Fig.8). Snapchat users can see the geofilters if they are within the vicinity of the business. We have created the largest geofence that Snapchat allows for the rate of \$5 USD per hour around the Sprouts location, demonstrating the area in which snaps would show up on users phones (Fig. 8).



Figure 8. Examples of photos taken with the Snapchat application (bottom) in an area within the geographical vicinity of Sprouts (top).

Board members could create event-related geofilters if they open a Snapchat account for the café. This account could help provide further marketing for the business as users would be sending photos to their contacts with Sprouts event branding. As geofilters are specific to a certain area and immediately downloaded on every Snapchat user's device, other people within the vicinity would discover Sprouts as they swipe through their photo filters, which is a common practice for Snapchat users. The cost varies with the square footage of the geofence. For example, the area around the old Student Union building and Nest would cost \$5 USD per hour (Snap n.d.).

Finally, we suggest that Sprouts advertises their new debit and credit system, as this is a selling point for many patrons who do not carry cash. Sprouts should also consider investing in Square's contactless card reader to help decrease transaction times and lineups. This will also make them able to accept Apple pay, Samsung Pay, and Android pay. The card reader costs \$50 USD and will easily integrate into their current system (Square n.d.).

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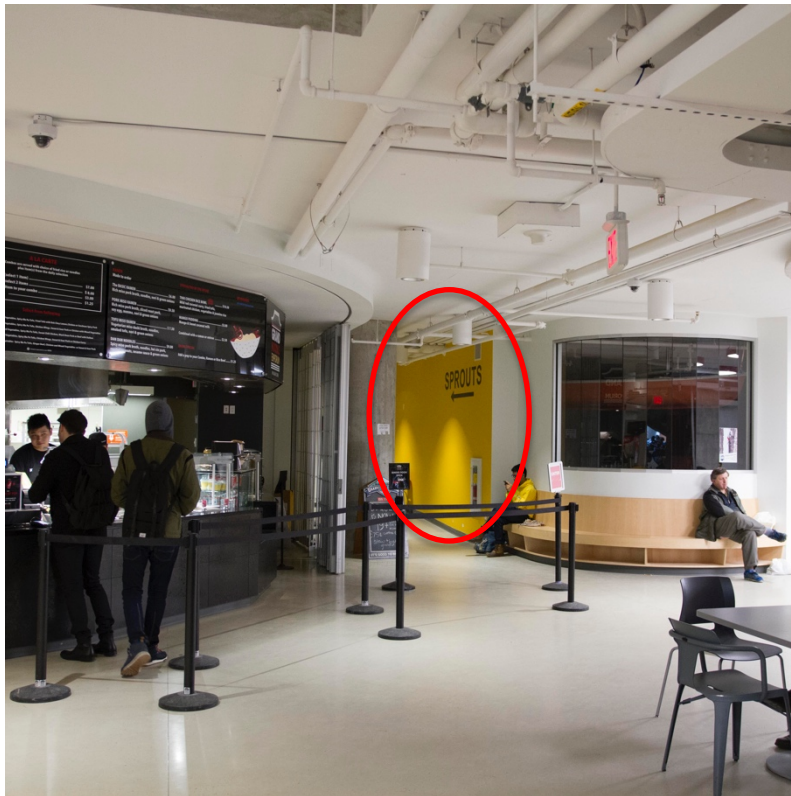
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## 8. Appendices

### Appendix A. Current location of Sprouts

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Appendix B. Sample of posts created for Sprouts



Appendix C. Posters created for Sprouts

NOW LOCATED IN THE OLD SUB

# COMMUNITY EATS

LUNCH EVERY FRIDAY @ 11:30  
BY DONATION  
BRING YOUR CONTAINER

The logo for 'sprouts' features a stylized green sprout with three leaves above the word 'sprouts' in a lowercase, serif font.

 @UBCSprouts 

A STUDENT-LED INITIATIVE

# COMMUNITY EATS

The logo for 'sprouts' features a stylized green sprout with three leaves above the word 'sprouts' in a lowercase, serif font.