Pia Dank
Marshall McCready
Evva Lee Jones
Micaela Gonzalez
Shannon Liao

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Professor Harrop
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Final Project: Covino's Pasta & Pizza

Covino's Pizza and Pasta is a local, family-owned, Italian restaurant and eatery with an authentic and diverse lunch and dinner menu guaranteed to appeal to even the pickiest eaters. Their lengthy menus are complete with appetizers, entrées, desserts, drinks, and a little something for the kids. Covino's is a great place for a casual meal, a romantic date, or even an energetic get-together. They are dedicated to sticking to their authentic roots and staying true to the legacy started by the owner's father. Covino's wants to open its cuisine to all and to do so they want to utilize the tools social media has to offer.

For our project, we chose Covino's Pasta & Pizza, a local Italian restaurant in Plano, TX, that serves authentic, New-York style eats. Their restaurant motto is, "At Covino's Pasta & Pizza we believe in great food and great service - nothing fancy, just great Italian food with a New York neighborhood flair." Covino's location is central located in the city of Plano which boasts a population of 286,057, as of last year. Plano is a large, diverse, and family-oriented suburb of the DFW Metroplex, making it a great location for Covino's to reside.

A social media presence could potentially increase Covino's customer frequency, making existing customers crave their food more often, increase their reach by obtaining new customers, and increasing yield by encouraging people to host birthday dinners, company events, or simply bringing a friend. A social media presence would surely set Covino's apart from their competitors. Specifically, a presence on the social media site, Instagram, could potentially help Covino's reach those goals and also boost customer engagement.

Covino's Pasta & Pizza prides itself on their authentic, yet simple, Italian food. Their backstory, from their website, is as follows: "In 1951 Nick Covino opened up his Italian restaurant in Port Chester, NY. Nothing fancy, just great Italian food. Carrying on the tradition, in 1990, his son Joe opened his first Italian restaurant in Plano, Texas. Like dad's place, nothing fancy, just more great Italian food with a New York neighborhood flair." Additionally, Covino's gives customers a call to action on their website by saying, "Come and experience the great food and atmosphere for yourself. Fresh pasta and pizza, prepared daily."

Covino's currently exists on Facebook and Twitter, but their engagement is extremely low. They have 1,477 followers on Facebook (their largest following) and 1,497 "likes." Their Twitter has only 54 followers and they currently do not have an Instagram page, however they have a location tag on Instagram where about 60 customers have checked-in at Covino's. More people have publicly checked-in at Covino's on Instagram than actually follow the restaurant on Twitter.

Ultimately, the goal of creating a strong social media presence is to increase frequency, reach, and yield (FRY) through the marketing strategy laid out in this report. Another goal is to create more customer engagement through more creative content and expanding the restaurant's social media presence to Instagram.

Covino's Pasta & Pizza is currently present on Facebook and Twitter, but they have most of their engagements and followers on Facebook. As stated previously, Covino's has approximately 1,500 "likes" on Facebook, and only 54 followers on Twitter. Twitter currently has the lowest engagement, where there is virtually none. On Facebook, Covino's has outstanding reviews but only received one to ten likes on many of their posts and about tone to two comments per post. Covino's does do a good job of replying to customers via social media.

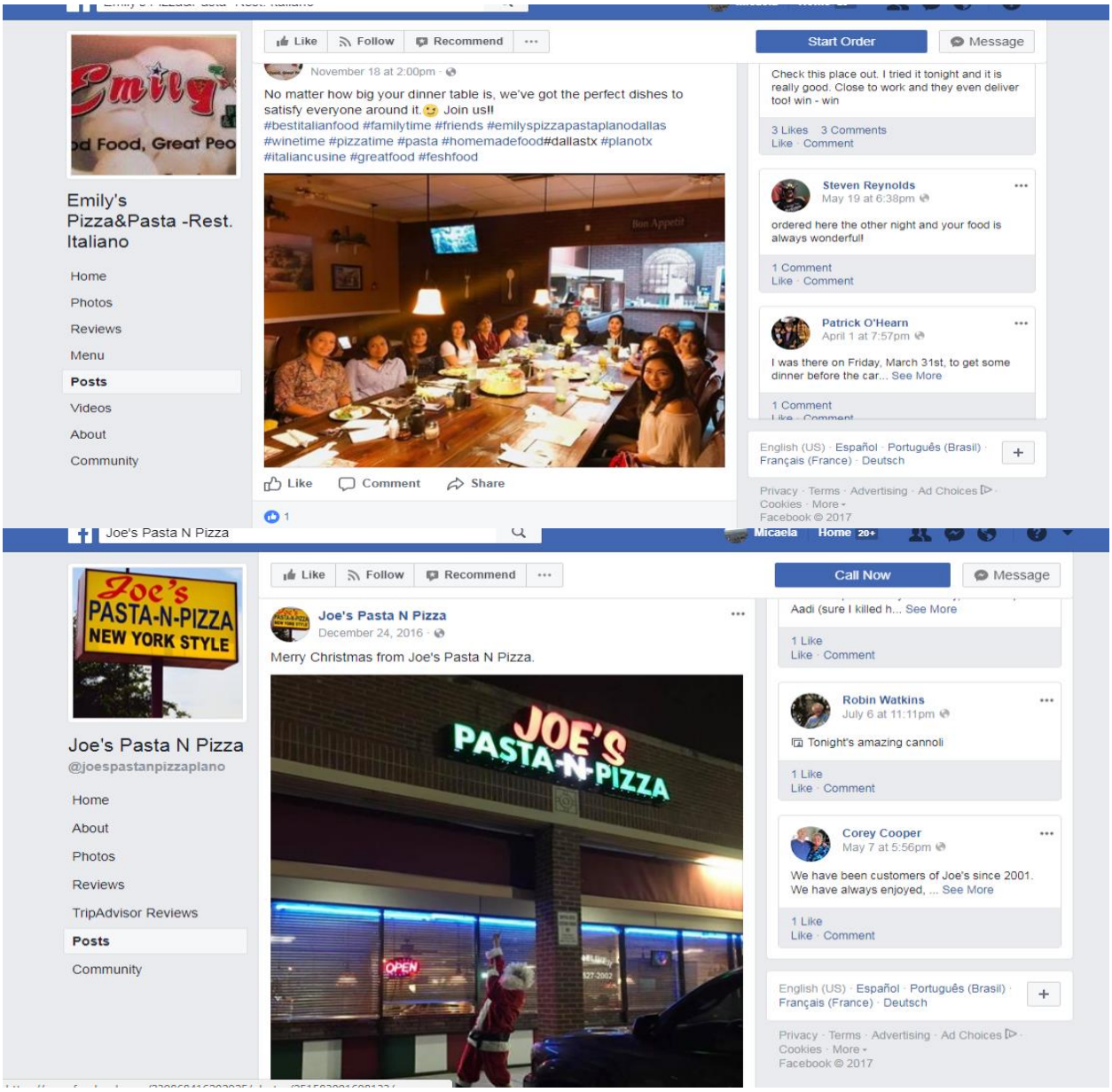
Here are a couple examples that display their type of content and their engagement from customers:





As you can see, Facebook recommends some of Covino's competitors off to the right of the screen. Some of Covino's competitors include Kenny's East Coast Pizza, Emily's Pizza & Pasta, Joe's Pizza-N-Pasta, and other local, small business and Italian restaurants. Overall, none of Covino's competitors have a particularly better social media presence. The closest competitor in terms of social media would be Kenny's East Coast Pizza. While they only have 1,300 followers on Facebook, they do have an Instagram where they have a boastful 482 following. This further proves that the demographic is there. The other restaurants do not even come close to Covino's on social media. While they exist, they do not post good, engaging content, and they are not consistent.





Joe's Pizza-N-Pasta has a particularly weak social media presence because this post pictured above can be found after scrolling down just four posts. This reveals that they have only posted four times since Christmas of last year.

Covino's customers, based on social media, are mostly white, and middle-aged skewing older. These people also appear to be mostly family-centered type folks. There are a lot of organic comments and praise on Covino's site, but there are also some posts by recurring people that are a bit suspicious as to whether or not they were solicited. Overall the demographic makes sense for the platform Covino's users. The lack of following on typically "younger" social platforms like Twitter, may explain why it has not seen the same success. On the contrary, Instagram, although it might be expected to skew younger in terms of demographics, has proven to have an older

following, and specifically an older following of Covino's, even though Covino's is not officially present on the site. Approximately 60 people have "checked-in" and Covino's Pasta & Pizza on Instagram and have tagged their location in their photos. This is purely organic content that Covino's is currently underutilizing.

For social media platforms, we decided to use Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Covino's top used social media platform is Facebook, so we will stick to that and try to improve user interaction and improve posts. Covino's also has a Twitter, but they don't really post current things in relation to Covino's. The company's Twitter seems very friendly because they interact with other users, but they can really improve on their posts. Something that would really benefit Covino's is a Instagram page. They can advertise their food more, upload higher quality photos, and do fun photo contests with prizes offering customers free food or discounts. Overall, Covino's really needs to focus on creating higher quality photos. The photos they currently post aren't interesting, dynamic, or well taken; they're amateur at best. They don't do much to entice customers and it doesn't make them stand out. It is very important to us to use pictures so people can get an idea of what food at Covino's is like; they should be able to taste the food through the image. To do this, we will stay away from generic pictures of food and make sure the posts are topical. For example, make posts according to the season or other popular events going on in the media like "International Pizza Day" (February 9th). Twitter will be used mostly the same way. We want to improve engagement of customers and get more people in the door. We plan on doing this by doing contests to win food or get a reduced price from time to time. Twitter is also a great place to have a conversation with followers; they can retweet customer pictures and compliments, address customer concerns, and jump in on trending hashtags.

The target demographic we want to focus on are younger people. There are a lot of students in immediate area surrounding the restaurant, but it seems like none of them have heard of Covino's. Italian food is very popular with young people and, by making the social media accounts of the business more relatable and engageable, we can increase their following and attract more customers that way.

We want to create new content that relates to current and popular events for younger people. This new content should be uploaded at least twice a week. We also plan on doing giveaways for free pizza or a free dinner at least once a month. Contest prizes and holiday specials wouldn't cost as much as the gains from it. To win these, the contestants will have to produce the best comment, the best picture or something else that gets them involved. Covino's will create a hashtag for these contests. The benefit of this is to engage current and future customers. This way there will also be more motivation to follow the Twitter, Instagram and Facebook accounts of Covino's.

Twitter



“Happy Halloween!
Visit us today in a costume and get 20% off your dinner. Our pizza is to die for!”

Instagram



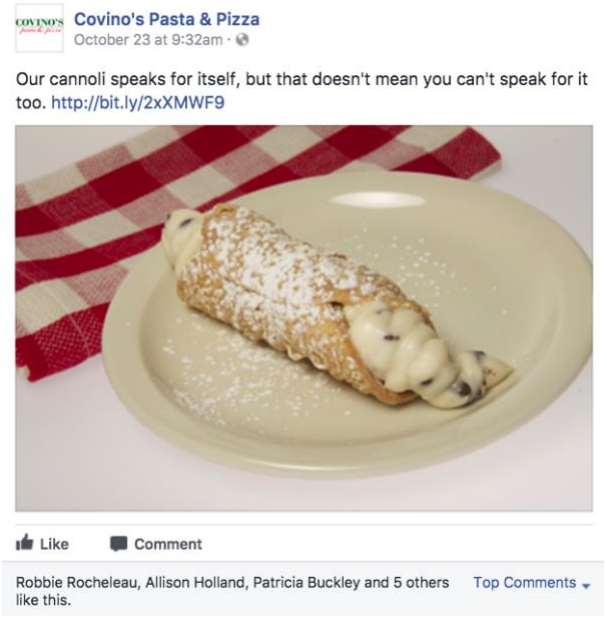
“Come try our new broccoli pizza! After all, you need your veggies.”



“Can you wait to dig in? Come in today and get 10% off your lunch!”

Along with having our new content posting, the company would benefit from having a social media intern responding to feedback on a daily basis. This person could track current trends to always apply those trends to Covino’s content. There is no need for celebrities, but rather just frequent and genuine engagement with current customer by sharing their pictures, quickly responding to their comments and concerns, etc. Most importantly, Covino’s needs to keep creating and posting their own pictures. This task can be performed by the intern. Most likely, there will only be the need for a single intern. This person would not need to be in the restaurant at all times, but maybe he or she could work part-time. According to payscale.com, marketing interns earn between $19,592 and $40,942 per year.

Due to the extraordinarily low engagement on both Covino’s Pasta & Pizza’s Facebook and Twitter pages, only a few cheap and simple tools would need to be utilized in order to dramatically boost the restaurant's following on social media as well as their consumer engagement numbers. It appears as though Covino’s already uses a relatively simple application such as Buffer in order to post the same content to both platforms simultaneously (as shown below), but, in an effort to make the marketing content more targeted and effective, we plan to use an application that features not just scheduled posting, but also tracking and analysis capabilities.



(Facebook Post)



(Identical Twitter Post)

Covino's is relatively primitive in its current capabilities so it does not currently require any additional expensive functionalities as of yet. It does not have the funds nor the need for anything more than cheap, basic social media tools and practices. The only additional element needed before going about tracking and analyzing the content is an account on the Instagram platform.

In order to learn what posts resonate more with the audience and curate more engaging content, we plan to use the social media tracking application Hootsuite. Through this app, we can monitor posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to discover when is the most effective time to post content, discern what kind of content is the best for growing the audience base and promoting consumer participation in social media contests, and track how successful marketing campaigns launched by the social media intern are by analyzing the metrics before and after the campaign's launch.

To aid in the efforts to track and analyze social media content, the marketing department will formulate unique hashtags to be used by consumers when they make posts online to showcase their food and be entered in contests. These hashtags will allow the posts to be much more easily tracked and identified as relevant to the restaurant as opposed to another unrelated company or campaign. Hootsuite will be able to track the hashtags and incorporate the data from the posts in its analysis.

The specific kinds of data that will need to be collected can be divided by content posted by the restaurant and content posted by consumers:

Relevant Data from Covino's Posts (for each platform)

- Number of likes and comments on each post (engagement)
- Number of shares/retweets by consumers for each post
- Times of posts that have relatively more engagement
- Days of the week that correlate with higher engagement levels
- Content type of posts that correlate with higher engagement

Relevant Data from Consumer Posts (for each platform)

- Number of posts with and without location tags
- Number of posts that contain a Covino's hashtag for a contest or campaign
- Time and day of the week the posts were published
- Demographic information of the consumers who post content relating to Covino's such as:
    - Age
    - Gender
    - Occupation
- Any other posts by the user that involves other restaurants or food for the purposes of:
    - Identifying potentially successful techniques competitors are utilizing
    - Discovering growing food trends/memes that could be capitalized upon by the business
    - Determining what other businesses pose a threat to Covino's sales

As previously mentioned, using the Hootsuite application will be instrumental in the marketing department's efforts to gather this key data to focus and steer any marketing campaigns or advertising, however, some of this information will not be possible to mine using the application's algorithm and will instead require a human's touch. This kind of data includes the information on customer posting habits (have they posted about other restaurants, what other hashtags or food trends are they incorporating into their posts, etc.) as well as demographic information. Since many people do not post their age on social media sites such as Instagram, some estimation will be required and this estimation is best performed by a human being - preferably a cheap marketing student intern.

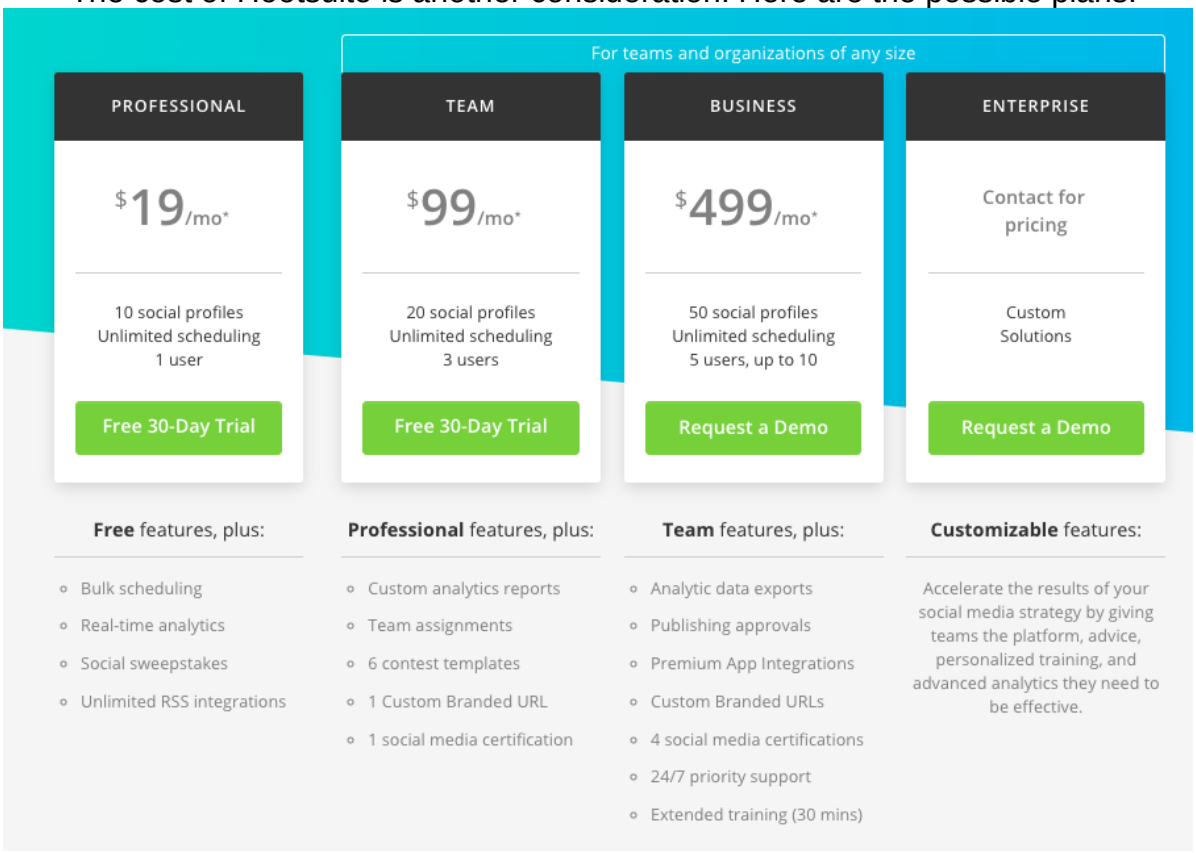
Very little expertise would be required for the level of tracking and measuring operations Covino's needs to more successfully market itself. If these more fundamental steps are met with significant success and business growth, then perhaps more sophisticated tools and a higher level of expertise would be beneficial, but for now a college student majoring in marketing or communications should be capable of performing the types of data collection and organization tasks detailed above.

It is important to make sure that this student is in her or his junior or senior year of college and has taken the courses relevant to these activities such as Advertising, Social Media Marketing, and Marketing Research. The content and hands on projects featured in these courses should be sufficient education for a sharp intern to be able to

not just measure and analyze the data effectively, but also formulate a cheap fairly low scale marketing campaign based on her or his findings.

According to a report posted in 2012 by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the average internship salary for a sophomore college student is $15.36 an hour and the average internship salary for a junior college student is $16.82 and hour. Due to the fact that this internship would be a part time job and the small size of Covino's Pasta and Pizza, the intern would be working for a set $16.00 an hour approximately 20-25 hours per week. This equates to roughly $18,000 per year for the intern's salary.

The cost of Hootsuite is another consideration. Here are the possible plans:



For the sake of these current marketing objective, the cheapest plan, Professional, would be sufficient. Covino's only needs to focus on the primary social media platforms at first in order to grow and there are only three of these (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). Eventually other platforms should be utilized, but for now 10 is more than enough. Also, only one intern is being hired for the marketing so the fact that the cheapest plan only allows for a single user is not problematic.

Altogether the total cost of the intern and the application for a year is approximately $18,240.00, however, if this is too expensive for the business, a shorter period of time could be established to begin this marketing strategy or the wage and/or work hours of the intern could be reevaluated.

Luckily, due to the basic nature of the activities involved in this strategy, there are very few risks involved. The technical aspect of the strategy is quite simple, there is little possibility of any ethical concerns, and it is difficult to imagine running into any reasonable legal concerns. However, there still are some risks associated with this marketing strategy. These risks stem from potential incompetence on the part of the intern and difficulty isolating necessary data using the Hootsuite application and human investigation.

If the intern is incapable of performing the necessary tasks or lacks oversight, nothing productive can possibly be accomplished. If the intern does not already understand how to use Hootsuite or is incapable of effectively learning and using the platform, he or she cannot acquire the data necessary for the strategy and thus cannot even begin to formulate any valid campaign ideas for the business. The intern is crucial to the entire project and should be selected carefully.

If the Hootsuite application does not efficiently collect the data needed and the intern is forced to find it without using a program, a significant amount of time and money would be wasted. Hootsuite is highly rated and should be able to perform as advertised, but may not be as easy-to-use. Luckily, this risk is much more easily mitigated than the first since there are numerous other similar applications available to use for similar prices.

Overall, Covino's needs to improve on their production of social media posts and interacting with customers, add a Instagram page, and hire a social media intern. Covino's does interact with their customers on Twitter for example, but their interactions are not about Covino's food but rather random things people post. If Covino's focused more on posting about the food or addressing what customer's post about them, then it would make them look more put together and professional. Covino's competitors' social media pages are not as good as Covino's which eases concerns regarding competition in the social media space. However some of the competitors do possess Instagram accounts, which provides them a potential advantage. Instagram is popular among today's current social media users and, when it comes to food posts, Instagram is the perfect place. Also, since we are trying to target younger people, Instagram is something Covino's should start posting on.

If Covino's hires a social media intern, posts would be more targeted, diverse, and engaging, thus dramatically improving the restaurant's social media presence. Making photo contests and creating fun seasonal promotions will also bring in more customers to Covino's. With these contests, hashtags will be made allowing the intern to more easily track the campaign's success and retrieve data from Covino's posts and customers who use that hashtag's profiles. Hootsuite would be the perfect tool to track Covino's interactions and, since Covino's isn't a large company, it wouldn't be too expensive. Of course, there could be the potential problem of if the social media intern doesn't know how to use Hootsuite or doesn't check on it, making it a waste of money, time, and resources. There could also be the problem of if Covino's doesn't want to

implement anything to help their social media, then of course nothing would improve. Currently, Covino's Pasta & Pizza is in a good place, but they can always enhance themselves and be in an exceptional place.