

Students Head to the Mall to Learn Key Business Concepts

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SUBJECT(S): Economics

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

We all struggle to make our lessons interesting and relevant to our students. For a subject like product development or product planning, I know in advance I will need a variety of sources for engaging ideas.

I looked through the Knowledge @Wharton High School website and found a topic all students are interested in – the mall – in particular, the Mall of America in Minneapolis. Here's a place they all understand. They may not know market potential from market share, but they can tell you which stores are doing well and which ones aren't, and probably why. They are experts on a business whose inner workings they probably haven't thought much about. Because I have spent a lot of time discussing service industries, I decided a mall would be a good topic to study. A mall is a product in itself — an entertainment venue as well as a place to shop. Deciding on the range and scope of its stores requires mall planners to create an in-depth business and marketing strategy so that their 'product' appeals to its target audience. In addition, planners must take into account that the amenities a mall offers will vary depending on the demographic and geographic group it serves.

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“Zara’s ‘Fast Fashion’ Business Model”](#)
- [“Why Germany Is the Driving Force in the Eurozone”](#)
- [“Why Forever 21 Filed for Bankruptcy”](#)

- “Mall Madness: Behind the Scenes of an American Shopping Mecca”

Purpose:

- to get students to think about product development as an integral part of business operations
- to help students understand that product development is not just about tangible products but also about the service industries that make up a majority of our Gross Domestic Product
- to get them to understand that product development is an ongoing process for successful businesses.

Objectives: Students will understand product development and will apply the concepts to a local business or group of businesses to change and improve their product or service.

Resources /Materials

1. Student computers
2. WGYE website, including story titled, “[Mall Madness: Behind the Scenes of an American Shopping Mecca.](#)” In addition, we found useful links at the end of the article, such as one to the Mall of America homepage, to a site on the global retail real estate industry, and to a guide for environmentally-conscious businesses.
3. Anticipation Guide for the WGYE article. An anticipation guide is a short “quiz” the teacher gives to students before they read an article. They answer the true/false or multiple choice questions based on their current knowledge. When the students read the article, they look to see if they have answered the questions correctly and, after each question, they identify the page, column and paragraph that prove their answer right or wrong. This involves students in the article and encourages them to read for key points and understanding. Some of the questions that I wrote in this anticipation guide included these multiple choice:
 1. How many people are employed at Mall of America?
 2. What percentage of stores are targeted to teens at MOA?
 3. Our mall, King of Prussia, has 400 stores. MOA has how many?

Activities and Procedures

1. Students fill out an anticipation guide with seven quick questions about the Mall of America before they read the Wharton Global Youth Program article, *Mall Madness: Behind the Scenes of an American Shopping Mecca*.
2. After finishing it, students are directed to the WGYP website and told to find the article on MOA and read it.
3. The students “correct” the anticipation guide based on the reading.
4. They are given 10 minutes to explore articles and links related to the MOA article.
5. Students are then broken into groups of two to brainstorm ideas on how to change our local mall to draw more shoppers. (10 minutes)
6. Students regroup and discuss ideas.

Tying it all Together:

In our discussion, we focused on MOA as a product and how it differed from other more conventional malls. Students began to see how its uniqueness makes the product better.

Some student insights and behaviors included:

- They were surprised to learn that MOA is still only the second largest mall in North America and that our local King of Prussia Mall is the third largest. They were very impressed that “their” mall holds this status — and began trying to find out more information.
- One student used the links at the end of the MOA article where we then directed others for such information as the floor plan amenities, a store directory and pictures.
- Students were riveted by MOA’s size, scope and fun. They studied the floor plan and were impressed by the roller coasters and aquarium.
- Suggestions for our local mall included adding a swimming pool and drop off babysitting
- Everyone thought our local mall should be cleaner.
- For almost half an hour, this bright but rowdy class was on task and doing beyond what had been asked of them. (How often does that happen?) Incidentally, the boys in the class were just as engaged in this activity as the girls. Shopping is not just a “girl thing.”

Future activities that can be linked to this include:

- Bring the general manager of a mall in as a guest speaker to class.

- Create a “Design a Mall” project to incorporate all four chapters of this unit in the textbook – production, distribution, pricing and promotion.
- Have a field trip to the mall and conduct a “scavenger hunt” for different mall attributes (This could also be done as a homework assignment). Then have students analyze the positives and the negatives of the product design.

What worked and what I would do differently next time

This lesson plan and ones like it using different articles are great for getting students to read for content. If I just put an article in front of them or assign it for homework, many students either skim it, pretend to read it or just don't do anything. The culminating activity where the students had to work with a partner and make a list of things they would change at our local mall was their “ticket out of the classroom.” This makes everyone responsible for participating.

To make this plan better I would follow up the next day with a project on malls and have students develop their own mall for a specific target market.

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