
Reviving Rebekah's Operational Plan

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Abstract

Ms. Rebekah Wilson is an entrepreneur living and working from home in Creola, Alabama, U.S.A., and has ventured into her second small business, Revive. The Revive company provides furniture refurbishing services and makes home and office décor pieces. The company's slogan is "transforming junk into jewels." Ms. Wilson launched Revive after being laid-off from The Real Yellow Pages (YP) company. Due to multiple family and friend requests and the need for Ms. Wilson's furniture items to be refurbished, Revive was born and opened for business in 2015. However, the furniture restoration business has proved to be a time-consuming operation involving multiple steps when taking a furniture item and refurbishing it into a finished piece of artwork. Moreover, Ms. Wilson has faced some operational challenges with Revive in the areas of product management, sales and marketing, and customer service. This case study provides a solid background of Ms. Wilson as an entrepreneur and the day-to-day challenges faced while operating a small business. This case is appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate-level business students specifically in majors or courses about marketing, management, small business management, entrepreneurship, and leadership. Multiple student learning objectives and assignments are provided to include analyzing the Revive company using a SWOT Analysis (Humphrey, 2005), Porter's Five Forces Analysis (Porter, 1980), and the Boston Consulting Group Matrix (Henderson, 1979). Lastly, students will need to provide recommendations on the outlook of the Revive business moving forward.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, strategy, marketing, small business management, leadership



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INTRODUCTION

Ms. Rebekah Wilson is the sole-proprietor of Revive, a furniture restoration, home, and office décor company. Revive is a home-based business located in Creola, Alabama where Rebekah resides with her family. Creola is a small town 16 miles north of Mobile, Alabama, the U.S.A. on the Gulf Coast. Before launching the Revive Company, Ms. Wilson had a monogramming company, Totally In Stitches. Additionally, Ms. Wilson has 20 years of corporate experience working in such industries as insurance, telecommunications, and advertising. The Revive Company was launched in 2015 after Ms. Wilson was laid off from YP, The Real Yellow Pages where she worked as a Field Collector, Premise Collector, and Field Service Manager. Ms. Wilson believes that the main purpose of Revive is not as much about furniture as it is about using whatever is available and "transforming junk into jewels." "Transforming junk into jewels" is also the Revive company slogan.

CASE OBJECTIVES

The focus of this case is to analyze Revive's business operations to include product management, customer service, and marketing. The case was generated through field research as the author of the case is the sister-in-law to Ms. Wilson. Students will be able to quickly identify multiple operational issues that need to be tackled. However, the primary focus of this case pertains to the day-to-day challenges Ms. Wilson encounters as an entrepreneur.

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CASE SYNOPSIS

Ms. Wilson's professional background consists of having worked for 18 years in the insurance, telecommunications, and advertising industries. Ms. Wilson has been willing to relocate for career opportunities and did move from Creola, AL to Hebron, KY for a job with Great American Life Insurance. Moreover, Ms. Wilson raised four children while pursuing an education and a career. Lastly, Ms. Wilson has launched two small businesses either as a side hustle or as a main source of income.

The first small business Ms. Wilson launched was as a side business in 2003, Totally in Stitches, which focused on monogramming services. The second small business, the main source of income for Ms. Wilson, was launched in 2015, Revive, and focuses on furniture restoration, home, and office décor. It was after being laid off from YP, and receiving multiple requests from friends and family members that Ms. Wilson decided to launch Revive. Ms. Wilson faces operational challenges with Revive in the areas of product management, sales and marketing, and customer service.

BACKGROUND

Ms. Wilson has a strong work ethic working since the age of four collecting bottles and selling them for cash. At age 12, Ms. Wilson worked at Rambo's Skateland on the weekends, and at age 15, Substation II. Afterward, Ms. Wilson was hired as a bagger at the Food World grocery store but was promoted to cashier after two days. Ms. Wilson's handwriting and artwork were noticed by the manager and Ms. Wilson was then made the artist and sign clerk. Ms. Wilson has good negotiating skills and was making \$8.00 per hour at Food World when the minimum wage was \$3.35 per hour.

While in high school, Ms. Wilson completed two years of art instructional school and two years of business courses. Ms. Wilson was an officer in the Future Business Leaders of America organization and won a state contest in the Distributive Education Clubs of America. Ms. Wilson got married and started a family and went on to achieve several post-secondary accolades after graduating from Mary G. Montgomery High School in Semmes, AL,

For example, Ms. Wilson obtained an accounting certificate from 20th Century Business College, and a certificate in Microsoft Certified Systems Engineering from the University of South Alabama in Mobile, AL. Additionally, Ms. Wilson studied business and nursing for three years at the University of South Alabama. In total, Ms. Wilson's business education consists of three years in high school and three years at the university level.

Furthermore, Ms. Wilson has had ongoing corporate business training attending numerous onsite business conferences on such topics as (1) inventory control, (2) merchandising, and (3) marketing. Ms. Wilson has experience in the construction industry, as well, assisting in finding new store locations. Ms. Wilson also has 30 hours of Occupational Safety and Health Association training. Lastly, Ms. Wilson has experience in training new-hires with the onboarding process at point-of-hire. Through all of these career endeavors, Ms. Wilson's family grew to four children with the last child, Schuyler, being homeschooled.

Professionally, Ms. Wilson relocated from Creola, AL to Hebron, KY to work for Great American Life Insurance in Cincinnati, OH from 1997 - 1998 as an Agent Compensation Representative II. Due to being unable to make two monthly mortgage payments with the Creola, AL home not selling as anticipated, Ms. Wilson decided to move back home to Alabama. In 1999, Ms. Wilson began working at T-Mobile U.S.A., Inc. beginning as a Sales Support Manager and Business Sales Coordinator and lastly as a Regional Administrative Assistant and Safety Coordinator for the entire Southeast Region. Unfortunately, in 2007, Ms. Wilson was laid off from T-Mobile, U.S.A., Inc. and in 2007 began working as a Field Collector, Premise Collector, and Field Service Manager at YP, The Real Yellow Pages (formerly known as AT&T Advertising).

After being laid off from T-Mobile U.S.A., Inc. Ms. Wilson decided to venture into entrepreneurship and started a side business, Totally In Stitches. This company specialized in monogramming embroidery items, such as towels, purses, clothing, and gym bags. Ms. Wilson worked fulltime at YP while running Totally In Stitches. The monogramming equipment, fabrics, blanks, stabilizers, bobbins, and embroidery programs proved to be an expensive business venture.

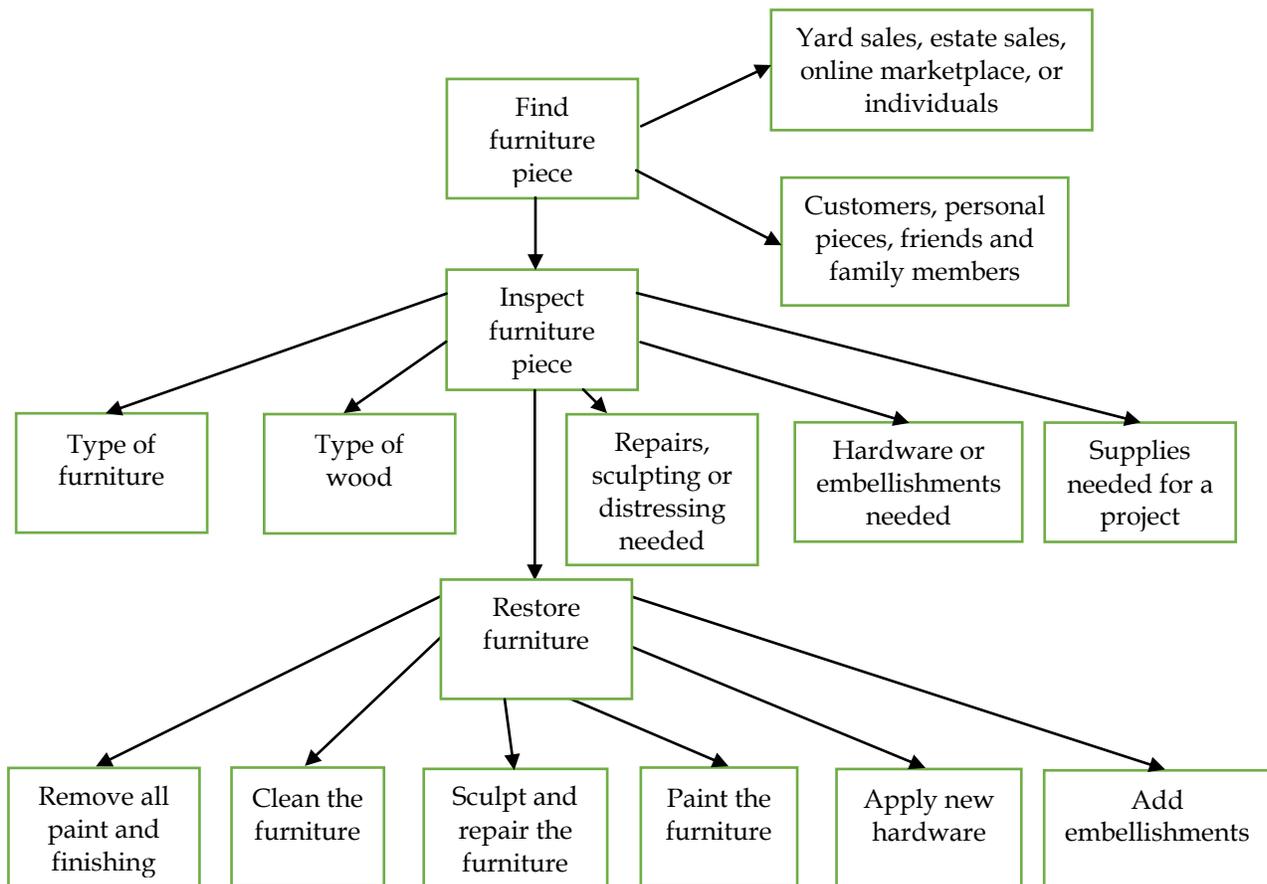
Furthermore, Ms. Wilson bought each design and font, plus new fonts were continually being produced. Customers would spend an hour or more deciding on which designs to select from and then would typically only order one item. Moreover, maintenance on the monogramming equipment would cost \$150.00 for a tune-up, and the monogramming process is time-consuming and takes a long time to master.

Becoming an entrepreneur was attractive to Ms. Wilson due to the ability to work from home and assist with Schuyler's homeschooling. After being laid off at YP and having friends and family members requesting orders, Ms. Wilson decided to launch Revive, a furniture restoration, home, and office décor company. The company's decorating items include wall paintings and wood carved accent décor pieces for the home and office. Ms. Wilson restores items that most people would discard and upcycles the pieces to save them from being discarded into a landfill for disposable waste materials.

PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

The furniture restoration business proved to be another time-consuming business venture for Ms. Wilson. As shown in Figure 1, There are multiple steps involved in taking one furniture item that needs refurbishing to completely refinishing and restoring the item.

Figure 1. Steps in the Furniture Restoration Process



Ms. Wilson is a self-taught artist and finds her furniture pieces through local yard sales, estate sales, online marketplaces, friends, family members, personal items, and through new customers. Initially, when beginning to restore a furniture item, the furniture piece has to be fully accessed regarding the type of furniture it is, the type of wood it is made from, and what hardware was originally used to build the furniture. Once the initial inventory of the furniture item has taken place, the cleaning process begins

where repairs and sculpting happens. During the cleaning process, the old paint and finishing are removed. Then sanding the furniture occurs, however, oversanding can cause problems such as wood buckling.

The remaining steps to refurbish the furniture item includes applying different types of sealants, paints, finishing coats, hardware, and embellishments. There are many different types of furniture refurbishing supplies required depending upon the project's needs. An example of some of the supplies needed includes, but not limited to, premium chalk, clay paint, 0000 steel wool, tack cloths, chalk paint, beeswax, krud kutter, white vinegar, coconut oil, hemp oil, grit sandpaper, chemical-proof gloves, power equipment, polyurethane, chemical stripper, water-based and oil-based stains, respirator masks, verbena salve, safety glasses, metallic paint, fusion mineral paints, acrylics, milk paint, mud paints, and wood appliques. Ms. Wilson buys the majority of the project supplies at Lowe's, Michaels, Hobby Lobby, Ace Hardware, and online. However, highly specialized supplies can be harder to find.

Distressing the furniture is another process involved in the restoration process which creates a weather-beaten look. Once the furniture item is completely refurbished, a photo shoot takes place where the furniture is professionally staged with lighting. Accent pieces are placed on or around the furniture as part of the staging process, for example, with lamps, artwork, flowers in a vase, and books. The amount of work, effort, and supplies that are needed to get the finished product reconditioned, repainted, and added with new hardware and embellishments can be daunting.

The refurbishing process and staging take place in Ms. Wilson's home either in the living room, the dining room, a spare bedroom, or outside in the back yard. There is an attached sunroom on the back of the house which is used as a workshop. Ms. Wilson prefers to clean and paint the furniture outside because the natural lighting is so good in the Flora-Bama area. However, if it starts to rain, this proposes a problem. Then the furniture items have to be pulled back into the sunroom or the house.

Ms. Wilson does rent square footage space for \$75.00 per month in two antique stores in the Creola, AL area, and pays a 10% commission on all items sold to the store owners. This is more lucrative than consignment which takes a 30-40% commission cut. Refurbished items that have not sold or waiting to be rotated among the two local antique stores are stored in two offsite 10 x 10 storage units. Ms. Wilson stores the refurbishing tools in these two offsite storage units and transports the tools back and forth to the house for each project.

Furthermore, many of the furniture items are big, heavy, and awkwardly shaped and loading and unloading the pieces prove to be challenging for Ms. Wilson. It frequently takes two people to load and unload the furniture items and Ms. Wilson does not always have another person there to help. Ms. Wilson needs to hire two assistants but is unable to afford to do so at this time.

Rotating the furniture pieces between the two storage units and the two local antique shops is a multi-step process. Currently, Ms. Wilson uses her Honda Pilot Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) as the transport vehicle. Due to Ms. Wilson not being able to move big and heavy furniture items alone and with the limited workspace at home, being able to take on a lot of additional orders has been challenging.

Ms. Wilson currently averages three furniture, home, or office décor orders per day but needs to double that amount for the business to become profitable. However, due to limited storage unit space, the home inventory needs to be cut back by $\frac{3}{4}$'s. Both storage units and the house are full of incomplete orders or completed orders waiting for customers to pick up. Moreover, additional supplies are needed. For example, a wood branding iron is needed to make crafted wood pieces and sea creature cut-outs. A glowforge is likewise needed to make different types of embellishments.

Furthermore, having the time to fully invest in the restoration business has been difficult for Ms. Wilson. It takes time to locate furniture and décor pieces, shop for supplies, restore and stage the pieces for sale, provide estimates to customers, stock the antique stores, take customer orders, generate pricing per project, and write customer order contracts.

Ms. Wilson also has the added task of facilitating Schuyler's homeschooling. Schuyler had originally been going to a private school, but Ms. Wilson was unable to continue paying for that tuition. There is a public school in Citronelle, AL, but it is a 45-minute drive and Ms. Wilson does not want Schuyler to go there.
To

compound operational issues, during the summertime, there are few sales due to everyone going out-of-town on vacation.

SALES AND MARKETING

Ms. Wilson primarily uses word-of-mouth and social media marketing for Revive. Other customers come by way of foot traffic from the two antique stores where Ms. Wilson rents floor space serving the surrounding communities of Creola, AL, and Saraland, AL. Regarding social media marketing efforts, there are two Revive Facebook pages. One is a public page and one is a private group page. Both pages have before and after photos of Revive's refurbished furniture, home, and office décor items.

Likewise, these before and after photos are used to promote the business and showcase Ms. Wilson's artistry skills and talents. The public Revive Facebook page currently has 1,000 likes and the Revive Facebook private group page currently has 100 members. With limited monies to put into the Revive Facebook public page, Ms. Wilson does not participate in any Facebook for business strategy due to the added expenses of having to pay for promotional boosts. Facebook promotional boosts allow for targeting a particular market and setting a duration for that boost.

Furthermore, Ms. Wilson had an investor who was willing to financially assist with securing a brick-and-mortar Revive storefront. However, after crunching the numbers on the payback of this investment Ms. Wilson decided to decline the offer. Regarding Revive branding, the logo initially started with a fairy blowing birds from a hand along with the slogan "transforming junk into jewels" written on the logo. The color scheme for the initial Revive logo was purple, pink, and black. Ms. Wilson then changed the color scheme for the logo to black and white. A 3rd logo was created showing a capital "R" with a crown on top of it, using a black and white color scheme with the company name Revive written underneath.

Lastly, a 4th logo can be found within the two Revive Facebook pages showing the company name in white with a white butterfly on top of the last "e" of Revive. Lastly, Revive T-shirts were made displaying the black and white logo and the Revive company name to help promote the business. Ms. Wilson wears the t-shirt frequently out and about in town, as well as in photos posted on the Revive Facebook pages.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customers typically drop off and pick up furniture items to be refurbished at Ms. Wilson's home in Creola, AL. Sometimes Ms. Wilson has to pick up and drop off the furniture items at the customers' homes. This has to be done if the customer cannot bring the item to Ms. Wilson's house or if the customer has not picked up a finished furniture item on time. Ms. Wilson uses a personal vehicle, a Honda Pilot SUV for all transporting operations required of the Revive business. The SUV although roomier than a car, is still not big enough to transport bigger, heavier, or awkwardly shaped furniture pieces back and forth from customers' homes or from the house or storage units to the two antique shops.

Generating pricing for each project for customers has been a challenge due to the uniqueness and customization of each furniture or décor item. Ms. Wilson has to first take into consideration how much the furniture or décor item is worth, and account for all supplies needed to restore the item. Additionally, labor costs are factored into the project pricing. Other miscellaneous expenses such as mileage to transport the item is likewise taken into consideration. Moreover, due to privacy and security reasons, Ms. Wilson does not like customers coming over to the house to drop off and pick up items.

Additional customer operational issues include customers delaying picking up the refurbished item(s) after the project has been completed. Other times, customers want to pick up the items much sooner before Ms. Wilson has had the time to complete the order. There seems to be a disconnect on the timeframe of when a customer can expect to pick up completed orders. Thus some customers have been left unsatisfied. On a few occasions, customers have abandoned the furniture pieces altogether. After being burned several times, Ms. Wilson started enforcing signed customer contracts requiring a 50% deposit on all refurbishing orders.

New customers have been harder to generate due to how time-consuming it is to complete an order for an existing customer. There are always multiple backorders waiting to be filled. Likewise, in the middle of an order, a new customer will inquire about needing an estimate for a potential order. Ms. Wilson has

to then stop working on existing orders to travel to see the item in person to provide an estimate to the potential client. Sometimes, new clients will arrange orders after receiving an estimate, but then decide to not follow through with it. Lastly, taking time off from work to generate furniture estimates in hopes of gaining new clientele prolongs the completion of existing orders for Ms. Wilson.

CONCLUSION

Ms. Wilson needs some business consulting regarding the Revive company operations in the areas of product management, sales and marketing, and customer service. How can you help the Revive business thrive?

TRAINING NOTES: CASE USE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This case is intended for use in a variety of undergraduate or graduate-level courses to include, marketing, management, small business management, entrepreneurship, and leadership.

1. Students will be able to create a SWOT Analysis (Humphrey, 2005) of the Revive business.
2. Students will be able to design and evaluate the Revive business using Porter’s Five Forces Analysis (Porter, 1980; 1998).
3. Students will be able to assess the Revive business by using the Boston Consulting Group Matrix (Henderson, 1979).
4. Students will be able to prepare a recommendation for the Revive business moving forward.

TEACHING NOTES: CLASS ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Design a SWOT Analysis (Humphrey, 2005) of the Revive business
2. Design and evaluate the Revive business using Porter’s Five Forces Analysis (Porter, 1980; 1998)
3. Assess the Revive business by using the Boston Consulting Group Matrix (Henderson, 1979)
4. Lastly, after fully analyzing the Revive business, prepare a recommendation for Ms. Wilson to consider moving forward with the company?

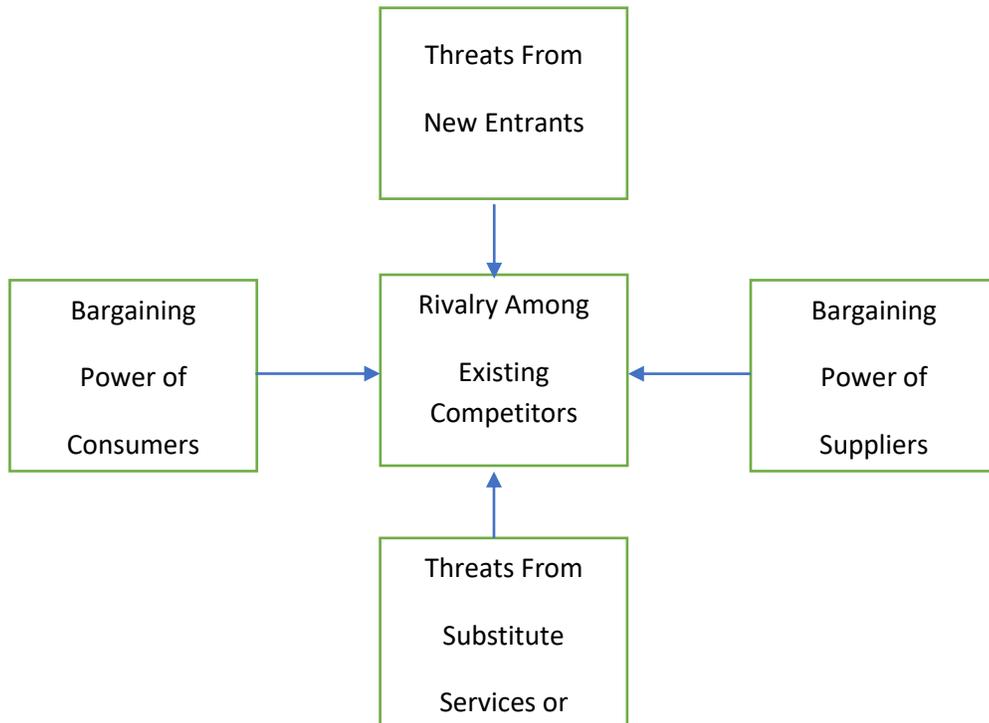
TEACHING NOTES: ANALYSIS

1. Design a SWOT analysis (Humphrey, 2005) of the Revive business

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restoring furniture items in need; giving pieces a “second chance” • Flexible, home-based business • Ms. Wilson’s strong work ethic, negotiating skills, and formal business training and experiences • Ms. Wilson’s strong ability to multitask • Ms. Wilson’s creativity skills and skilled training • Good quality of finished pieces • Professional lighting and staging of pieces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-consuming restoration process • Limited workspace • Hard to handle big, heavy and awkwardly shaped furniture items • Inconsistent branding • Refurbishing equipment is stored in multiple locations in the local area • Few customer orders • Ms. Wilson juggling the business and Schuyler’s homeschooling • Multiple Facebook Revive business pages

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality before and after photos • Investor interest in the business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers abandoning furniture orders
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing artistry skills training needed for Ms. Wilson • Brick-and-mortar storefront • Rebranding of logo • Consistent pricing structure • Hire assistants • Cargo trailer • Schuyler could start attending a public school • More strategic “Facebook for Business” strategy • Virtual estimates as opposed to in-person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flaky and indecisive customers • Antique stores not having floorspace to rent • Injuries due to moving heavy furniture items • Ms. Wilson’s lack of time to invest in the business • Seasonal business • Confusing brand messaging • “Big-box” and local small business furniture store competitors • Customers deciding to “do it yourself” (DIY) or buy new furniture pieces instead

2. Design and evaluate the Revive business by utilizing Porter’s Five Forces Analysis (Porter, 1980)



Threats from New Entrants: Low

- a new furniture refurbishing, home, and office décor artist would need knowledge of the resources required and where to locate the resources for the refurbishing process to take place
- specialized furniture refurbishing skills, talent, and materials are required from any new artist going into this type of business
- the ability to build relationships with local antique shop owners for renting floor space is needed

Bargaining Power of Consumers: Medium

- consumers can purchase new furniture instead of having personal items refurbished
- consumers are not as informed about the refurbishing process as the artist is completing the work
- consumers can decide to refurbish personal items in backward integration efforts (i.e., “do-it-yourself”)

Rivalry Among Existing Competitors: Medium

- easy exit business
- furniture stores consisting of both “big-box” furniture retailers and local small business stores compete with the furniture refurbishing business
- consumers can easily switch furniture brands during the shopping process

Bargaining Power of Suppliers: Medium

- a large number of furniture suppliers are in the area with stores of all sizes and types (i.e., “big-box” furniture store retailers, antique stores, locally-owned small business furniture stores)
- there is customer exclusivity on customers seeking refurbishing personal furniture items
- furniture items are made from commodity supplies, for example, wood, brass, and steel

Threats from Substitute Services or Products: Medium

- there are few skilled and talented furniture restoration artists locally
- buyers do not have to wait when buying new furniture as when waiting for an item to be refurbished
- brand new furniture pieces are attractive to consumers due to being new, having good quality, performance, along with other pertinent features

3. Assess the Revive business by utilizing the Boston Consulting Group Matrix (Henderson, 1979).

Based on the Boston Consulting Group Matrix, the Revive Company would be a dog. Dogs are products that have a low market share and a low growth rate. Dog businesses are considered cash traps because money is tied up in the business, but little return is coming back into the company.

4. Lastly, after fully analyzing the Revive business, what do you recommend Ms. Wilson do moving forward with the company?

Ms. Wilson should continue with the company as a side business but not as a main source of income.

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