

Strategic Marketing Plan for Zen West: Creating Customer Value through an Extraordinary Experience

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Team Real Value



Roadside Cantina

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Executive Summary

Since 2006, Zen West Roadside Cantina has taken the concept of a typical American diner and has given it a completely new perspective through its 1950's Western decor, energetic cantina atmosphere, and vast menu of "Tex-Mex" dining options. Located on the corner of York Road and Belvedere Avenue, Zen West is at the center of a small restaurant hub in North Baltimore. Zen West aims to differentiate their restaurant from competitors in the area by strengthening their relationships with target markets, offering special enhancements to consumers, and by providing overall superior value to diners. **By increasing social media usage, creating weekly specials and events, and using various marketing techniques to target specific audiences, Team Real Value will work tirelessly to assist Zen West on their quest to sail through the waters of the blue ocean strategy and ultimately boost sales, build Zen West's reputation among Baltimore locals, and consistently create the most superior customer experience.**

Company Description

Zen West opened its doors in fall 2006. After having much success with their first restaurant, Cafe Zen, brother and sister team, Po and Jo Chang decided to move from Chinese cuisine to Tex-Mex food.¹ This brother and sister duo worked to put different spins on typical roadside diners. After growing up in Texas, the two decided that Zen West would be the perfect mix between a Tex-Mex styled cantina and a local diner.² In addition to Po and Jo Chang, the two worked with Spike Owen, a restaurant consultant, to finalize the details and turn their York-roadside eatery dream into a reality. For over ten years now, Zen West has proven itself to be a hit with all Baltimoreans- the old, the young, the college students, and anyone who enjoys a good, old-fashioned quesadilla with a side of salsa (or a Corona if you're of age!).

Located the corner of York Road and Belvedere Avenue, Zen West is situated in a restaurant hub given its close proximity to Towson shopping plazas, Belvedere Square, Roland Park, and Charles Village. The restaurant has been around for over 10 years now, and it has received a 4.1-star rating on Google. This neighborhood cantina has something for everyone and can cater to a wide range of age and class demographics. Their menus cater to any diner who enjoys American food, Mexican, or both with choices including chicken sandwiches, tacos, cheeseburgers, nachos, and more.

Zen West is open for lunch and dinner on all days the week, and on the weekends between 11am and 3pm, brunch menus are available. With several events throughout the week, as well as, a dance floor on Saturday's "College Nights", Zen is open to the public and for anyone over the age of 21, Zen West can go from a traditional cantina to an energetic staple of Baltimore nightlife.

Mission Statement

According to the restaurant's website, "Zen West Roadside Cantina offers great food in a fun and unique setting, evocative of the glory days of Route 66".³ Zen West's mission is to

¹ Sloane Brown, "Tex Mex, Comfort Fare at Zen West," Tribunedigital-baltimoresun, September 27, 2006, accessed October 01, 2018, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2006-09-27/news/0609260067_1_zen-chicken-sandwich-grilled-shrimp.

² Sloane Brown, "Tex Mex, Comfort Fare at Zen West," Tribunedigital-baltimoresun, September 27, 2006, accessed October 01, 2018, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2006-09-27/news/0609260067_1_zen-chicken-sandwich-grilled-shrimp.

³ Andres Londono, "Zen West | Baltimore Tex-Mex," Zen West | Baltimore Tex-Mex, , accessed October 19, 2018, <http://www.zen-west.com/index.htm>.

provide a unique setting for families and friends to eat delicious, inexpensive food, watch live entertainment, and reminisce about the glory days of the West. Zen's interior decoration ensures that consumers feel a sense of nostalgia by utilizing decor that creates a "spin on the roadside diners (that the Chang siblings) grew up with in Texas." Finally, Zen West strives to be a friend of the community by building cohesive and welcoming relationships with the locals.

Short Term Goals

Our team has put together a marketing strategy to fulfill several short-term goals for Zen West. These goals are to be evaluated continuously over the course of six months to ensure that the marketing plan is on track, and that the goals are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. Our team recommends that Zen begins its new marketing campaign on January 1, 2019. After that initial point, we want Zen West to do monthly evaluations for the next five months (February 1, March 1, April 1, May 1, June 1). These bench-mark evaluations will ensure that Zen's marketing techniques are creating measurable results, producing revenue, and increasing the number of monthly customers who visit Zen West. This six-month marketing campaign in the early months of 2019 will hopefully increase annual revenue, drive sales, and build strong relationships with consumers and locals in Baltimore by delivering top-notch service. On July 1, 2019, a final evaluation will be conducted to conclude whether the marketing goals were attained.

Specifically, our short-term goals include: **1)** To increase sales in all areas of the menu (brunch, lunch, dinner, drinks). **2)** To create special enhancements and special menu offerings by instituting new weekly events (Weekend Brunches, "Ladies' Nights", "College Nights", "Kids-Eat-Free Nights", "Trivia Nights", etc.), selling merchandise (T-shirts, shot glasses, cups, bumper stickers, etc.), and creating special food and drink menus. **3)** To advertise "Venue Buyouts" for consumers looking to host parties, receptions, or meetings at Zen West. **4)** Host local musicians to come in and perform for diners on specified nights. This partnership with local artists shows that Zen is supportive of the community. **5)** To increase social media usage on platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Additionally, specific and exclusive Snapchat "geotags" can be created for diners who are patrons of Zen West. Social media usage will show that Zen actively engages with their audiences, keeps the public informed about events, and produces an online platform for users to connect with the company.

Each of these goals are easily attainable in the sixth month period that our team has designated for the marketing campaign. Through the monthly evaluations, Zen will be able to understand if the marketing efforts are showing a return on their investment, and if they are not, Zen can adjust the strategy to ensure that measurable and positive results are produced.

Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Zen West has a strong reputation among Baltimore locals, college students, and even tourists. Clearly, the restaurant has great food which can be seen through its high 4.1 Google Review Rating. The menu features a wide variety of offerings covering Mexican to American style food. Many reviews online praise Zen for their large menu which offers something for everyone. Between the tacos, quesadillas, burgers, salads, and French fries, there is an option for most diners. Zen even offers gluten-free options for diners with special dietary needs. This gives Zen West a strong competitive advantage over other companies who may not be able to cater to all types of diners. Additionally, Zen West is known for their energetic and engaging bartenders and servers. These servers who go the extra distance to deliver superior customer service do a great job of representing the company and the brand's value proposition. By continuing to

employ employees who can deliver excellent service, ensure that customers are satisfied, and add to the energetic atmosphere in the “Roadside Cantina”, Zen will continue to strengthen their reputation as an engaging and welcoming restaurant.

Unlike other restaurants that close after 9pm, Zen West has created a niche for itself by extending their hours of operation on Saturday nights for “College Nights.” Zen West caters to a specifically college-aged demographic by playing music, opening the dance floor, and offering low-priced drinks. Additionally, Zen West has certain themed nights like “Taco Tuesday” which offers other menu deals, as well as featuring live music. For those who like tacos, enjoy listening to local Baltimore musicians, or just want to spice up their Tuesday night, Zen becomes a highly appealing restaurant compared to other competitors’ venues who do not have special week night events.

Similar to other restaurants in Baltimore, Zen West also offers weekend brunch from 11am-3pm. Their brunch offerings and pricing are competitive with other brunch locations around the Baltimore area like Bond Street Social and Barcocina in Fell’s Point or Five and Dime in Hampden. While brunch is popular in Baltimore, there are not many other sit-down, “bottomless” brunches in the Northern Baltimore area. Other competitors would include Barcocina and Bond Street Social which are all the way downtown by the inner harbor. This makes Zen West a local, convenient, and inexpensive alternative for those who live in near Charles Village, Roland Park, Towson, or Northern Parkway.

Zen West’s menu offerings are competitively priced and relatively inexpensive compared to other local restaurants. For instance, Barcocina’s quesadilla is \$12, Blue Agave’s quesadilla is \$12.49 and Zen’s quesadilla is \$10.95 Clark Burger’s burger is \$7.90 for a cheese burger, The Greene Turtle is between \$10 and \$14 for a ½ cheeseburger, and Zen is \$9.95 for a ½ cheeseburger. Additionally, Zen West’s partnerships with GrubHub, UberEats, and PostMates allows for convenient online ordering and delivery.

Finally, Zen West has an eccentric and unique atmosphere. Competitors in the area include Belvedere Square which is a market style eatery and Clark Burger which is a typical burger joint. However, Zen is unique with its 1950’s Route 66 Decor, jukebox, ambiance, and range of drinks and meal choices: again, something for everyone-- Zen is not just a burger place or an average sandwich shop. Zen West offers all diners an extraordinary experience as soon as they walk through the front doors.

Situation Analysis: SWOT Analysis

<p style="text-align: center;">STRENGTHS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Great food: (4.1 Google Review Rating) - Wide variety on menu: Mexican to American style food - Energetic and engaging bartenders and servers - Affordable: appealing to local patrons- college students, families, etc. - Themed Nights: “Taco Tuesday”, “College Nights” - Weekend brunch from 11am-3pm: competitive with other brunch locations around the Baltimore area - E-Premise Partnerships: GrubHub and PostMates for online ordering and delivery - Eccentric atmosphere- uniquely themed restaurant 	<p style="text-align: center;">WEAKNESSES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complaints on Saturday nights about limited drinks, pricey basic rail drinks and extremely crowded- - Location-- the York Road location is not the best, but not the worst. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● North enough of the “bad” areas on York Road, but still on York ● Difficult to walk too because there aren’t major neighborhoods around - Potentially Negative Yelp Reviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recurring theme of disappointment with the service/employees ● Strong on food and atmosphere-- but weak on service
<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Speciality Menu offerings: specialty burgers (Buffalo chicken burger, Cowboy burger, etc.)- keeping up with competition - Brunch promotion: marketing to college students in the area for weekend specials - More “themed” nights/events - Live Music: consider changing up the style of live music throughout the week or adding special features when there are nights with live music - E-Premise Advertising: Promoting GrubHub and Postmates partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotion where you use a code and get \$5 off delivery - Advertise take-out - Advertising that the venue can be rented out and used for other specific events 	<p style="text-align: center;">THREATS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competition: here are other cheap and quick “Mexican” places like Qdoba and Chipotle only 0.6 miles away at the York Road Shopping Plaza <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus on the “home-made” food ● Focus on “family-run” business- consumers are willing to support local and family grown companies especially compared to chains with average “Mexican” fast-food - Crowded York Road/Belvedere shopping center with many restaurants (Belvedere Square, Clark Burger, Sofi’s Crepes) - Potential rising of food costs-- especially market prices of seafood - Raising prices could mean that customers no longer will eat at Zen

Internal Strengths and External Opportunities

One of the most important features of the Strategic Business Plan is the Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) Analysis which serves to evaluate both the internal strengths and weaknesses of a business while also examining the external opportunities and threats posed by situational factors in the marketplace. First considering the internal strengths of Zen West Roadside Cantina, of which there is a multitude, it should be noted that Zen West has a strong marketing mix utilizing what is colloquially referred to as the Four P's of marketing: product, price, place, and promotion. Zen West's product consists of a wide range of food primarily in the Tex-Mex style, such as Quesadillas, Tacos, and Carne Asada, but also includes more traditional options like Cheeseburgers, Sandwiches, and Wraps.⁴ Given the variety of choices, Zen West has expanded its target market beyond those who only desire a Tex-Mex style cuisine, and as a result, have increased the number of customers with which they can create value exchange relationships. Furthermore, the value in Zen West's food products isn't only derived from the menu variety but also from its consistent quality. Consistency in quality is key in the fulfillment of customer expectations thereby increasing their likelihood of returning. The is perhaps Zen's most important internal strength and it is reflected by the 4.1-star Google Review Rating and numerous personal reviews.

Considering the second "P" of the marketing mix, price, Zen West excels in offering lower-cost alternatives to many nearby Tex-Mex restaurants. Zen's direct Tex-Mex competitors, including Barcocina and Blue Agave, both have higher prices in a variety of options including their quesadilla which is \$1.05 more expensive at Barcocina and \$1.54 more expensive at Blue Agave. This lower price advantage serves to attract additional customers, particularly the price sensitive demographic of the market including college students. Zen West is also competitively priced with its more general competition, including Belvedere Market, Clark Burger, and The Green Turtle. A ½ pound Cheeseburger at Zen West costs \$9.95 compared to a \$10 to \$14 price at The Green Turtle (varies depending upon toppings),⁵ and Clark Burger's double patty alternative for \$9.80 without fries or a drink.⁶

Zen West's location is another strength that serves to attract many local college students from Loyola and Towson. This convenient location serves to keep transportation costs low, unlike many of its competitors located in Federal Hill and Fells Point. This geographic advantage has been further leveraged by Zen thanks to the lively weekend atmosphere created by the dance floor, music, and strobe lights. Zen's location, however, could be further leveraged to attract even more local college students on the weekend.

When considering the promotion methods employed by Zen West, there are both strengths to be commended and opportunities to be seized. Zen has been considerably successful in promoting special events including Taco Tuesday and Sunday Brunch. These special events provide fun occasions for individuals to come to the restaurant when they otherwise wouldn't so they can take advantage of deals, such as the \$1 tacos and \$12 pitcher margaritas during Taco Tuesday and \$12 bottomless mimosas during Sunday Brunch, and enjoy live entertainment like the Hall Williams Band. However, Zen could capitalize on the fact that majority of Loyola

⁴ Zen West Roadside Cantina. Accessed October 28, 2018. http://www.zen-west.com/_menuPages/.

⁵ "The Greene Turtle Towson." The Greene Turtle. Accessed October 28, 2018. <https://thegreenturtle.olo.com/menu/greene-turtle-towson>.

⁶ "Best Burgers, Poutine, and Fries in Baltimore, Maryland." Clark Burger. Accessed October 28, 2018. <http://www.clark-burger.com/>.

students do not go out on Friday nights by creating a weekly event like “Fiesta Fridays” including drink discounts and Uber vouchers.

Zen West has the opportunity to create and build an amazing staff. If the managers put in extra time to train employees properly and do routine checks, the business will have a great foundation. One way the company can accomplish this is by being very selective in interviews when hiring. For example, if someone is unenthusiastic during an interview, they will likely have a bad attitude when bartending or waitering. Additionally, Zen west should perform regular check-ups on the employees to ensure they are making the customers happy. Zen West has the opportunity to form the perfect staff that will consistently make customers want to return.

Finally, another opportunity in the restaurant business is to allow customers to rent out the space for events. For example, if someone is having a birthday party, graduation party, or any other type of event where there will be over twenty people, they will need a larger venue. Being able to cater events like these will bring in a lot of revenue because it brings in a large group of people. Through additional advertising and marketing efforts regarding “venue buyouts”, our team believes that Zen West could see a huge return on investment from this simple rental promotion. Zen West could offer a “venue buyout” do this by renting out one of the back rooms for events when needed. Zen West has a great dining room space with A/V capabilities, restrooms, and private bar that would allow for consumers to host parties, meetings, and other events. Restaurants constantly have opportunities to bring in new customers by creating a quality staff that can create happy customers, and by implementing new events and promotions to bring in people. Some of the members of have had experience in the event planning industry, and we can say with full confidence, that consumers are willing to pay top dollar for the opportunity to rent out their favorite venues to host special events.

Internal Weaknesses and External Threats

Despite the numerous strengths and opportunities Zen West possesses, there are also threats and weaknesses that need to be addressed. First considering internal weaknesses, the most consistent and recurring complaint on Yelp was that the wait staff was poorly trained and detracted from the overall experience As one Yelp reviewer named Kevin A. from Columbia, MD said, “the emphasis on customer service was not there. Wait/bar staff lack fundamental training. Manager spent more time focused on the band than the customers.”⁷ Moreover, on Saturday nights the bartenders have a difficult time quickly serving drinks often forgetting people and taking so long people get discouraged and give up, thus decreasing sales. These areas of internal weakness can be remedied fairly easily with a greater emphasis on employee training.

Zen West constantly runs the risk of encountering new problems as well as new opportunities. Some possible internal problems may arise within the staffing area of the business. All restaurant businesses must focus on both the service of the waiters and the quality of the food. In this case, some internal problems may come about when there are issues in either of these two areas. For example, Zen West risks having issues with improperly trained staff. This issue results in customers having an unpleasant experience and could lead customers to spread negative comments about the business.

Another possible internal problem could be the food quality. In any establishment that deals with the preparation of food, there is a risk that some food may be served undercooked if the chefs do not prepare food cautiously. Based on the Yelp reviews, this is an issue that Zen West has encountered a few times. Erin K. wrote, “We experienced food poisoning. When we

⁷ Kevin A., Marcus D., and Ayesha S., “Zen West Roadside Cantina - Rosebank - Baltimore, MD,” Yelp, June 29, 2018, accessed October 28, 2018, <https://www.yelp.com/biz/zen-west-roadside-cantina-baltimore-2>.

contacted GrubHub they informed us that Zen West would not refund our meal. GrubHub handled it well and is providing us a refund. HOWEVER, ZEN WEST should be the ones giving the money back. They are the reason we were vomiting. Disappointed and never eating here again.”⁸ Once a customer contracts food poisoning from any company, there is a very slim chance of him ever returning. This is why Zen West should follow all proper sanitary procedures when preparing food. These possible internal problems often lead to the external problems, which constitutes people spreading negative information about the food and service at Zen West. Yelp is the most prevalent way this information is transmitted to possible customers. When people encourage their friends to avoid eating at Zen West, it hurts the business from obtaining more customers. The only reason people spread bad reviews is if they have a poor experience, so it is therefore in the hands of the management and employees to ensure every customer leaves their establishment happy.

Zen West could also face external threats due to unfavorable market factors or trends that threaten the performance of the company. Zen West’s most significant external threat is that of local competition targeting the same market, such as the local college market on the weekend and the Tex-Mex market during the week. Two particularly threatening competitors for the weekend college market are The Green Turtle and Alonso’s. Currently, The Green Turtle has its discount night on Thursdays and provides an affordable discount program called “Beat the Clock,” but if it decided to move or extend this event to Saturdays this would be very harmful to Zen. Alternatively, if Alonso’s decided to stay open to try and attract more Loyola students’ business on the weekends by staying open past 11:30pm this too would be threatening to Zen West given that Alonso’s is in a closer and safer location. Similarly, Zen could see a decrease in its weekday patronage if Nacho Mama’s or On the Border decided to lower prices or create more specials. As things stand today, however, Zen does not face many imminent external threats and thus has time to grow and plan accordingly.

Finally, Zen West also has partnered with e-premise delivery services like GrubHub and UberEats. This allow Zen West to reach people who want their food, but do not wish to leave the comfort of their own homes, giving them the option to be patrons of Zen without having to physically dine at the restaurant. In order to attract more customers to this option, they could offer promotions or discounts on certain nights of the week. However, it should be noted that when using a third-party delivery service, errors or miscommunication can occur. As representatives of Zen West, these third-party delivery services should have the same values as the Zen and aim to deliver top-notch quality when delivering Zen West’s food.

Competitor Analysis

Zen West is a sit-down bar and restaurant serving Tex-Mex and other typical “bar food” such as burgers and sandwiches for lunch and dinner. Although Zen West is the only sit-down Tex-Mex restaurant in the York Road-Northern Parkway area, this does not mean that there is no competition. Within a three-mile radius, there is plenty of competition for Zen West. Just .06 miles up York road is the York Road Shopping Plaza which has quick and affordable counter-service “Mexican” restaurants such as Qdoba and Chipotle in which one person can eat for under \$10. Further up the road in Towson, approximately 2.6 miles, lies Nacho Mama’s and On the Border.⁹

⁸ Erin K, "Zen West Roadside Cantina - Rosebank - Baltimore, MD," Yelp, September 20, 2018, accessed October 28, 2018, <https://www.yelp.com/biz/zen-west-roadside-cantina-baltimore-2>.

⁹ Google Search, accessed December 04, 2018, <https://www.google.com/maps>.

Nacho Mama's is a local Baltimore restaurant that serves Mexican food and drinks. Nacho Mama's is known for its food and serving margaritas in a hubcap. Margaritas range from \$7-\$12 and hubcaps range from \$24-\$35. Tacos range from \$11-\$12 and are served with rice and beans. Nacho Mama's also serves weekend brunch with a selection of breakfast drinks such as mimosas. On its website, Nacho Mama's hosts several events in which live music is brought in. There are also events at Nacho Mama's to celebrate the community.¹⁰

On the Border is a Mexican chain restaurant. On the Border is known for its food and drink menu which includes a variety of tequilas and margaritas. Margaritas range from \$7-\$15. Tacos range from \$10-\$13. On the Border also has a calendar of events on its website that features select days in which they have \$2 margaritas or buy one, get one entree deals. On the Border also has a popular Happy Hour in which food and drinks are under \$5. They do not serve brunch.¹¹

The full bar is another part of Zen West's service. Local competition at the same intersection as Zen West are Jerry's Belvedere Tavern and Swallow at the Hollow. These two local bars are known for attracting an older crowd as opposed to the younger college students that frequent Zen West. Swallow at the Hollow is also known for its burgers that start at \$8.25. Monday through Friday there are daily food and drink specials, for instance, on Tuesdays for \$17.25 they have 20 wings and a pitcher of Natty Boh beer special.¹² Jerry's is also praised on Yelp for its comfort food and full bar.¹³

Further up York Road by 2.6 miles is the Greene Turtle Sports Bar & Grille. The Greene Turtle is a popular sports bar chain with multiple flat-screen TVs for watching a variety of sports. The Greene Turtle is also known for its pub food, full bar, and affordable beer during Happy Hour. The Greene Turtle in Towson is also friendlier to the younger college crowd due to the close proximity of Towson University, Goucher University, and Loyola University Maryland. They will often have happy hours and other events in which food and drinks are cheap enough for hordes of college students to take advantage of. They do not serve brunch.¹⁴

Consumer Analysis

Zen West is unique because the business attracts different types of clientele. The business attracts people who are interested in Mexican style food for either lunch or dinner, people who want to have a casual drink at the bar, and people who want to party at night. This wide variety of customers provides Zen West with an opportunity to bring a lot of different people into their business throughout the course of one day. People of all ages can enjoy the dining options, while customers at least 21 years of age can purchase drinks from the bar. Customers looking to purchase drinks from the bar early on in the night, from about 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. are most likely adults who are out of college looking to wind down after work. The crowd after 10 p.m. is likely

¹⁰ "NACHO'S TOWSON," Nacho Mama's, accessed December 04, 2018, <https://www.nachomamasmd.com/towson-menu/>.

¹¹ "Mexican Restaurants in Towson, MD," On The Border, accessed December 04, 2018, <https://www.ontheborder.com/locate/towson-maryland>.

¹² Swallow at the Hollow, accessed December 04, 2018, <http://www.thehollowbaltimore.com/>.

¹³ "Jerry's Belvedere," Welcome to Baltimore, Hon! July 13, 2009, , accessed December 04, 2018, <http://welcometobaltimorehon.com/jerrys-belvedere>.

¹⁴ "The Greene Turtle Towson." The Greene Turtle. Accessed December 3, 2018. <https://thegreenturtle.olo.com/menu/greene-turtle-towson>.

college students who want to party on the dance floor. The college students are not primarily from the Baltimore area, while customers who are not college students are likely locals.

One issue with the clientele at Zen West is the fact that many customers are college students. This poses an issue for Zen West during times that college students are not around, like winter break and summer break. Summer break is four continuous months without college students. This implies that Zen West may not have the best party scene for people during the summer months. To account for this trend, Zen West should attempt to attract more local adults in the area during the summer months. Zen West can do this by holding events similar to Taco Tuesday on the weekends. Offering live music will encourage adults in the area to come by for a casual drink with friends. In order to bring more customers in, Zen West should offer certain deals or promotions each weekend night. A discounted Margarita, for example, would compel more customers to choose this establishment over other similar ones in the area.

Zen West may also want to consider catering more to families. A Mexican restaurant is very family-oriented because it is a great place for families to grab dinner on any night of the week. One way they can do this is by offering a deal that caters to children. A common example of this is the “kids eat free” deal. This deal states that for every adult dining at the establishment, the customers will receive one free kids’ meal for kids under a certain age. Zen West could do a variation of this deal where kids eat half off on some nights. Deals like this will bring in more families because families are always looking for cost-efficient ways to feed their children. Bringing in more families for dining and more adults on weekend nights, especially during the summer months, will help Zen West expand their clientele.

Current Market and Consumer Behavior Trends

The customer behavior trend of college students is much more unreliable than that of the neighborhood and local people who like Mexican food. For instance, college students should be viewed as a seasonal customer base. Students often go on break which means a long month in the winter and two months in the summer where there is a steep drop in business in terms of people coming in on weekend nights. This is not even to mention all of the other sporadic, short breaks throughout the school year. Also, bars are constantly going in and out of favor among college students. As long as Zen West continues to be the only cheap and easy to get to bar, they shouldn’t have a problem retaining their college-aged customers. Likewise, the close of Murphy’s Bar and Grill on York definitely boosted business for Zen West. While college students are a good target market for keeping Zen West busy during times where they otherwise would not be, they still are not spending as much as the community. Students really only spend money on food during the Taco Tuesday deal or occasionally on a Saturday night before everyone else shows up for the bar. Other than that, college students are just spending their money on drinks.

As for the neighborhood, Zen West has fostered a strong bond with the community that will render their behavior constant and dependable. Even if another Mexican restaurant did open, business from the community would take more than five years to dramatically change. The community knows and respects Zen West, and the people that go there obviously like the

Mexican food. Furthermore, Zen West has an eclectic look and unique vibe that would be hard for another restaurant to replicate.

Target Markets

Due to Zen West's wide menu, unique charm, and location, the restaurant has several target markets. The most obvious target market would be anyone looking to purchase Mexican food in an authentic venue. This Mexican styled food is different from Qdoba or Chipotle however, the market here would be looking for a great, sit-down dining experience. Rather than walking into the venue and ordering a burrito to-go, Zen offers a great venue, engaging servers, and food options ranging from authentic Mexican to local Baltimore favorites to sandwiches and more. Aside from the obvious market of people who want authentic, quality Mexican food, Zen's target markets would include music fanatics, sports fans, college students, families, and neighbors looking for a local bar or restaurant. For the music fanatics, Zen caters to this market because of their live music on Tuesday nights. For anyone looking for great Tex-Mex dinner options and live music, Zen is the place to be. For the sports fans, Zen has a large bar and table seating in the front of the restaurant where sports games can be broadcast. Here, sports fans can gather, watch the games, and purchase an item from Zen's expansive food and drink menu. For college students, Zen has advertised "college nights" on Saturdays that start around 9pm and end around 2am. Zen's location is perfect for attracting a large college crowd. Zen is 2.0 miles from Loyola, 2.4 miles from Towson University, 3.5 miles from Goucher College, and 2.8 miles from Johns Hopkins. Each of the colleges create a target market for Zen's "College Nights", and they are all easily accessible by car (an Uber or Lyft ride to Zen from Loyola is generally much cheaper than an Uber ride downtown or to Federal Hill). Finally, for neighbors and families, Zen is a great local eatery located close to the Senator Theater, Belvedere Square, and the Roland Park/Northern Parkway neighborhoods. Zen's menu is fairly inexpensive, has a huge offering, and the venue has table seating. Additionally, Zen's target market can also appeal to any consumer who may not want to leave their house or cook and wants to order food for delivery. Zen has partnered with UberEats and Grubhub, which has allowed their market to expand to this group.

Positioning and Differentiation

Specifically speaking, Zen has the ability to cater to a wide demographic of consumers. For women between the ages of 25 and 55, Zen could do specials like "Ladies' Night". This could be a beneficial way of bringing in more women (individuals or groups) to the bar for drink and food specials. For men (and women), older than 21, Zen could offer special "Game Night" offerings during football or baseball games. For local Baltimore residents, Zen could show Baltimore teams' games and offer accompanying specials. Zen already has a children's menu; however, Zen could offer a "Kids' Eat Free" special to help drive sales and appeal to families with children who may be deterred to eat out because of the added expense. For college students, Zen already does a "college night", but perhaps they could offer different specials, add live music, and add a dinner special so students can eat before the dance floor opens.

Zen's primary products are their Tex-Mex food offerings and drinks.¹⁵ Zen has a large bar in the front of the venue which many customers opt for rather than sitting down at a table for dinner. The venue is casual, and the bar seating during televised sports games or during college nights draws in a large crowd. Customers at the bar can choose to order appetizers or full entrees, alongside an extensive list of drinks. The most popular items at Zen include quesadillas, nachos, tacos, burgers, chicken wings, and salads. Their menu focuses on Tex-Mex style dishes; however, they have many additional "American" cuisine offerings like chicken sandwiches, wraps, soups, and burgers. The products that Zen offers are already expansive, and our team does not see an area where they need to add more products. However, our team thinks that Zen should offer specials that specifically showcase lesser-known items on their menus. Many people understand that Zen is a Mexican restaurant near the Northern Parkway intersection on York Road. Many people may not realize that Zen offers products that do not fall under the Mexican food category. If Zen advertised these specific specials more through flyers around neighborhoods and college campuses, as well as through increased social media campaigns, our team believes that they could appeal to many consumers.

The market share that Zen will continuously have to monitor in order to remain competitive includes other Mexican restaurants, burger restaurants, and bars with affordable bar food. However, Zen has done a great job of attracting their target markets through their affordable and casual dinner offerings, as well as drink and bar specials. For example, Barcocina's¹⁶ quesadilla is \$12, Blue Agave's quesadilla is \$12.49, and Zen's quesadilla is \$10.95. For burgers, Clark Burger's cheeseburger¹⁷ is \$7.90, The Greene Turtle¹⁸ is between \$10 and \$14 for a ½ pound cheeseburger, and Zen is \$9.95 for a ½ pound cheeseburger. Each of these competing venues are favorites among Baltimore residents, tourists, and college students. However, Zen has done a great job being competitively priced while providing great service in a unique venue. Two major competitors that our team could potentially see having a large share of the market would be in regard to audiences who are solely looking for Mexican food. As previously stated, Zen is unique and appealing to the different markets because they offer quality Mexican food in a unique "Vintage 1950's cantina-meets-Route 66" atmosphere. However, if a consumer is looking for basic Mexican food like tacos or burritos, and they do not want to sit down to eat or are in a rush, Chipotle and Qdoba can be seen as major competition. Both fast-food Mexican restaurants are located within 0.5 miles of Zen. Zen's pricing is competitive, in line with other competing venues, and more often than not, cheaper than other restaurants. By

¹⁵ Andres Londono, "Zen West | Baltimore Tex-Mex," Zen West | Baltimore Tex-Mex, accessed December 4, 2018, <http://www.zen-west.com/index.htm>.

¹⁶ "Barcocina | Waterfront Mexican Inspired Restaurant and Social Scene," Barcocina | Waterfront Mexican Inspired Restaurant and Social Scene, , accessed December 4, 2018, <http://www.barcocina.com/>.

¹⁷ "Best Burgers, Poutine, and Fries in Baltimore, Maryland," Clark Burger, accessed December 4, 2018, <http://www.clark-burger.com/>.

¹⁸ "The Greene Turtle Towson," The Greene Turtle, accessed December 3, 2018, <https://thegreenturtle.olo.com/menu/greene-turtle-towson>.

using their pricing advantages, Zen can appeal to a wide target market and continue to compete with the other venues in the area.

Marketing Approaches: Action Programs

As stated, here are our team's short-term goals for Zen West: 1) To drive sales in all areas of the menu (brunch, lunch, dinner, drinks). 2) To create special enhancements and special menu offerings by instituting new weekly events (Weekend Brunches, "Ladies' Nights", "College Nights", "Kids-Eat-Free Nights", "Trivia Nights", etc.), selling merchandise (T-shirts, shot glasses, cups, bumper stickers, etc.), and creating special food and drink menus. 3) To advertise "Venue Buyouts" for consumers looking to host parties, receptions, or meetings at Zen West. 4) Host local musicians to come in and perform for diners on specified nights. This partnership with local artists shows that Zen is supportive of the community. 5) To increase social media usage on platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Additionally, specific and exclusive Snapchat "geotags" can be created for diners who are patrons of Zen West. Social media usage will show that Zen actively engages with their audiences, keeps the public informed about events, and produces an online platform for users to connect with the company.

Promotion Strategy

These action programs are to begin on January 1, 2019. New print marketing and advertising material will be distributed around the local neighbors, shopping centers, Baltimore-area colleges (including, but not limited to, Towson, Loyola, UMBC, Goucher, Johns Hopkins) in the form of flyers and posters. These print materials will feature the special weekly events, food specials, drink specials, and brunch specials. One incentive that our team suggests be added to these print materials are coupons that consumers can get discounts for by bringing in their flyer and showing it to their waiter or waitress. This will serve as tangible evidence that the print materials are working (or not working if we notice that no one is bringing in the flyers). On specific nights, Zen can also offer specialty food and drink offerings. By offering specific specials on the menus, sales can be boosted overall for items that may not be typically bought. For example, if Tuesday's feature specialty salads, the salad sales would see an increase on a night where tacos were generally sold in great quantities. On weekends, Zen could feature special brunch and breakfast items like omelettes or even french toast in addition to their drink specials. Finally, Zen could offer "buy one, get one specials" on drinks or food items to encourage groups to buy more of a specific menu item.

Competitive Pricing Strategy

The market share that Zen will continuously have to monitor in order to remain competitive includes other Mexican restaurants, burger restaurants, and bars with affordable bar food. However, Zen has done a strong job of attracting their target markets through their affordable and casual dinner offerings, as well as drink and bar specials. For example, Barcocina's¹⁹ quesadilla is \$12, Blue Agave's quesadilla is \$12.49, and Zen's quesadilla is \$10.95. For burgers, Clark Burger's cheeseburger²⁰ is \$7.90, The Greene Turtle²¹ is between \$10

¹⁹ "Barcocina | Waterfront Mexican Inspired Restaurant and Social Scene," Barcocina | Waterfront Mexican Inspired Restaurant and Social Scene., accessed December 4, 2018, <http://www.barcocina.com/>.

²⁰ "Best Burgers, Poutine, and Fries in Baltimore, Maryland," Clark Burger, accessed October 19, 2018, <http://www.clark-burger.com/>.

and \$14 for a ½ pound cheeseburger, and Zen is \$9.95 for a ½ pound cheeseburger. Each of these competing venues are favorites among Baltimore residents, tourists, and college students.

Our team has found that Zen has done a great job being competitively priced while providing great service in a unique venue. Two major competitors that I could potentially see having a large share of the market would be in regard to audiences who are solely looking for Mexican food. As previously stated, Zen is unique and appealing to the different markets because they offer quality Mexican food in a unique “Vintage 1950’s cantina-meets-Route 66” atmosphere. However, if a consumer is looking for basic Mexican food like tacos or burritos, and they do not want to sit down to eat or are in a rush, Chipotle and Qdoba can be seen as major competition. Both fast-food Mexican restaurants are located within 0.5 miles of Zen. Zen West should keep this in mind and arrange for special offerings to be promoted throughout the year to remain competitive against the other “fast-food” Mexican restaurants. However, Zen’s pricing is competitive, in line with other competing venues, and more often than not, cheaper than other restaurants. By using their pricing advantages, Zen can appeal to a wide target market and continue to compete with the other venues in the area.

Place Strategy: Themed Nights and Special Events at Zen West

Additionally, our team wants Zen West to try different themed nights. For example, on Monday nights, Zen could have a “Monday Night Football Watch Party” where special menu offerings and drink discounts are showcased. Tuesday nights could feature “Trivia Tuesdays”, this would bring in a middle-aged or older crowd and boost dinner sales on nights where sales are typically lower. Wednesday’s could be “Wine Wednesday’s” or “Ladies’ Nights” where Zen offers specials appealing to a female demographic. During the weekend, Zen could do more football or baseball watch parties, as well as special brunch offerings during the day time. Zen would feature a “Baltimore Pride” night where Baltimore sports teams’ games are shown. On Saturday’s, Zen should continue to emphasize their “College Nights”. And on Sunday’s, in an attempt to increase sales from family demographics, Zen could offer a “Kids Eat Free” specials. Additionally, as previously stated, our team recommends that Zen begins to advertise venue buyouts for different events that can be hosted at Zen. These events include birthdays, retirement parties, graduation parties, holiday parties, meetings, and more. And finally, we hope to see Zen working with local Baltimore musicians by hosting them to play live music on designated nights. We believe this is a great opportunity for Zen to show that they are involved in the community and interested in spreading awareness about local artists.

Product Strategy

Finally, our team has looked at popular trendy restaurants around the country to see how we can create specific product offerings and enhancements for Zen West. Emmy Squared, is listed on “Eater Nashville’s” website as one of “The Hottest Eateries of 2018”.²² This venue does a strong job of advertising their available rental space for private parties. They also have gift cards available for purchase on their website.²³ This makes sending gift cards for the venue

²¹ "The Greene Turtle Towson," The Greene Turtle, accessed October 19, 2018, <https://thegreenturtle.olo.com/menu/greene-turtle-towson>.

²² Delia Jo Ramsey, "The Hottest Restaurants in Nashville Right Now, November 2018," Eater Nashville, November 01, 2018, accessed December 04, 2018, <https://nashville.eater.com/maps/best-new-nashville-restaurants-heatmap>.

²³ "Emmy Squared," Emmy Squared, , accessed December 04, 2018, <https://www.emmysquared.com/>.

extremely convenient since consumers do not have to call or go to the venue, instead they can easily purchase and send gift cards online. I think if Zen implemented this, sales in gift cards, especially during the holiday season would be increased. Additionally, Emmy Squared has a great Instagram page linked to their website homepage featuring vibrant and aesthetically pleasing images of menu offerings. If Zen could update their website to include new pictures of their food, many consumers would be inclined to come to Zen to try some of the promoted food. Another restaurant that has seen recent success in Jacksonville, Florida is a Tex-Mex restaurant called Chuy's. This restaurant's website features pages that showcase their menu offerings, room for customers to write reviews, and a page dedicated to their "Commitment to the Community".²⁴ Additionally, Chuy's website shows that consumers can purchase specialty merchandise in-store and online. If Zen could add a place to their social media page or website describing their commitment to the community, our team believes that many neighboring companies and residents would be impressed with this. Similarly, if Zen could start advertising that they sell exclusive merchandise like shirts, bumper stickers, cups with the logo, or even shot glasses, I believe many consumers would find this to be an attractive aspect of the company. We researched these two popular restaurants because we found through their reviews and sales that applying specific points to the websites or social media pages is highly beneficial. In this digital age, many people turn to company's websites to learn more. Our team believes that if Zen could revamp its website to include aspects regarding their commitment to the Baltimore community, exclusive merchandise, and online ordering, many consumers may be more inclined to buy products from Zen.

Overall, the "product" attributes that Zen West has already implemented into their business model have proven to be successful. The Zen West brand is unique because it stands for so much. Zen West offers Mexican food to its customers, as well as a bar scene for college students on Friday and Saturday nights. The Zen West brand should reflect both the food and beverages that the company serves. Through this brand, Zen West is able to create a name for itself. When the company brand name is concerned, Zen West should ask: What do customers think of when they hear the words "Zen West"? For example, when people hear "Target", they immediately picture the red bullseye logo. When people hear "McDonald's" they automatically think of the golden arched "M". Zen West should have a logo well designed, so that when customers hear "Zen West", they think of that particular image. The Zen West brand stands for the Mexican food and beverage experience. It is a place where people can go to enjoy a reasonably priced meal and quality beverages. As of now, the current logo reflects the Zen West brand meaning very well.

Zen West does a good job with their logo for several reasons. Their logo incorporates orange and red. A study done by the University of Winnipeg suggests that up to 90% of a person's decision regarding brand, has to do with the color of the logo and packaging. They found that the three most effective colors in eliciting a purchase were red, yellow and orange. The Zen logo incorporates two of the top three colors for attracting customers. The logo also utilizes a state route sign, which gives insight to the customer before they even walk into the door. The customer knows what to expect and is not disappointed when they decide to enter. However, the logo on the building itself does not reflect this. The "Zen West" in plain white print on brick does not create feelings of warmth and invitation. In fact, it looks quite rundown

²⁴ "OurMenu," Chuy's, accessed December 04, 2018, <https://www.chuys.com/>.

and not someplace a family would want to go to dinner or host throngs of college kids on weekends. Take The Greene Turtle in Towson for example, they have a custom font with their name on the front of their building. It is not flashy, but it gets people inside and you cannot see the brick showing through the faded paint. I recommend at least a new paint job for the “Zen West” on the outside of the building and a custom-made sign with logo if possible. The Zen West website could definitely use an update. The layout itself is great. It is simple yet effective. The menu section is also very easy to navigate, and customers can easily find what they are looking for without having to scroll through a long list of options. The photos and events tabs could use the most work. The photos they have up are good, but they lack an important piece, people. Not a single picture on the Zen West website has a person in it. They are all pictures of the bar empty or food. Pictures of food should not have people in them but there most certainly should not be pictures of the bar empty. Yes, I understand what they are trying to accomplish, make the bar look bigger. It is the same concept when a real estate agent recommends that the sellers take all the furniture out of the house. It looks bigger, but it also makes them look desperate. Put up some pictures of the busiest college nights mixed in with pictures of families having a bite to eat and some people having a drink at the bar. This is an easy fix that would add a lot to the Zen website and brand. Tag lines are a bit trickier. Tag lines are usually found in chain bars that don't have a sense of community. For example, Buffalo Wild Wings’ tagline “Wings. Beer. Sports.”. If Zen decided to use a tagline it might take away from the authentic feel the bar exudes. But an authentic tagline could catapult Zen to the next level. The tagline would need to be short enough to fit on a T-shirt while also capturing the vibe of the bar. Something along the lines of “Always Among Friends”, “For Neighbors and Friends”, “A Taste of the West”, “Never Settle for Less, Come to Zen West”, “Dine With the Best. Dine at Zen West”, or my personal favorite “Find Your Zen”. These are just a few possible taglines that could work wonders for Zen’s branding by putting them on T-shirts and other apparel (Emerald Insight).

Social Media Campaign & Internship Opportunity

Aside from print materials in the form of flyers and posters, our team believes that social media campaigns will be the most effective and cost-efficient way for spreading the news about upcoming events, specials, and opportunities at Zen West. Our research found that Zen West is currently active on Facebook. They have 1,439 people following their page and 154 reviews. They are usually good with responding to and handling negative feedback on their page. They also have a clearly laid out section for their contact information, address, and hours. This is really helpful since many restaurants do not provide this information in an easy to reach spot. However, they only post about two or three times a month, and their layout is disorganized and outdated. It’s clear that their Facebook is not a priority, and they don’t seem to have tasked any specific person with managing it.

Zen West is also currently active on Instagram. There are two Instagram accounts which might be confusing for some people, but the most recent account has 469 followers. The Instagram is more organized than the Facebook page, and they post about three to four times a month. There is also an obvious, consistent aesthetic which looks more professional than their Facebook page. Whoever runs the Instagram account should also look into the Facebook page since the Facebook page has more followers. And while Zen West is on Twitter, account is unprofessional with many grammatical errors, and they have no posts since 2014. However, they

still have 171 followers. It looks like Zen used this platform to intermingle with the other York Road business such as Swallow at the Hollow and The Senator Theatre. The community and consumer engagement online is a positive aspect, however, the company will need to re-launch their account and maintain a professional tone with the public.

By increasing social media use, posting photos and videos from Zen showing consumers having a great experience, eating delicious food, and partaking in great events, the public can see that Zen is a fantastic dining option. Social media campaigns are relatively cheap as well. By saving money by not having to pay for ads on TV or in newspapers, Zen West can afford to hire a skilled social media manager who can post creative and engaging content on the company's owned media space. Our team even recommends reaching out to local colleges by offering a "Social Media Manager Internship". This opportunity would show the community that Zen wants to assist in teaching and training students who are interested in management, media, or communications while saving money through hiring an intern rather than a professional who may charge more for their work than a skilled student looking for experience in the field.

Financial Data: Budget

Our team has calculated that a budget of \$6,500 should be allocated for this six-month marketing campaign. While \$6,500 is the minimum budget, depending on the choices of events, products, amount of marketing material, and potential new hires of interns or social media marketers that Zen employs, the budget may need to be increased. However, we believe an than effective campaign can be achieved at this relatively low cost. First, if a social media intern is hired for the social media marketing campaign, this intern could be unpaid or paid minimum wage. This means that at most, an intern working 20 hours and week for \$7.50 would only need to be paid \$3600 after six months. Next, to change the company's website, www.wix.com is a great resource offering free website design. All that would need to be purchased is a website domain which typically runs \$10-\$15 annually. For flyers and other print material, Vistaprint is a great company that can print pre-designed materials for inexpensive prices.²⁵ Our team, or the hired intern, can design promotional material, send the copy to Vistaprint, and they will create flyers. For instance, if Zen West ordered 250 5x7" flyers advertising a "Taco Tuesday Event", the cost for the flyers would be \$177.97. Finally, to order over 100 CustomInk t-shirts, the cost would be between \$4 and \$5 for each shirt with free shipping.²⁶ Through our research, our team has found affordable companies to work with to produce promotional material and attractive merchandise.

Return on Investment

Since the budget is relatively low due to the majority of marketing being done on Zen West's own social media pages, the return on investment will be huge. If \$6,500 is put into the marketing campaigns to create an updated website, new merchandise, and special themed events during the week, our team has found that Zen will be able to increase foot traffic into the venue, increase sales, and sell additional merchandise for additional profits.

Organization

To summarize our team's marketing strategy for Zen West, we will briefly cover 1) the who: the organization, 2) the what: the implementation, 3) the when: the evaluation, and 4) the how: the control. First, the "who", or the organization of the marketing plan will deal with

²⁵ Vistaprint.com, accessed December 04, 2018, <http://www.vistaprint.com/>.

²⁶ "How Custom Ink's Pricing Works," CustomInk.com, accessed December 04, 2018, <https://www.customink.com/prices>.

collaboratively working with Zen West's owners, managers, social media marketer, and Zen West employees. Our team will ensure that all employees from the top management to the servers are briefed on the marketing strategy and understand what actions they can take to ensure the goals are achieved by the end of the six-month marketing plan. We will task the owners and management with overseeing staff operations, overseeing budget management, and engaging actively with the community. The employees working on the specific marketing material, will report to the owners and get approval on all material that is to be released to the public. Finally, servers, hosts, and bartenders will be reminded on company policies and the brand's mission statement. Since this group is engaging the most with diners, they are the first representatives of Zen West and will work to promote Zen's mission to provide great service in a unique atmosphere while delivering superior value to consumers.

Implementation

Next, is the "what" aspect of the campaign involves the different aspects described in the "Product, Price, Promotion, and Place Strategies" sections of this report. By following along with our team's recommended promotional discounts, competitive pricing, special offerings and enhancements, and special events, Zen West will surely rise far above local competitors and be recognized as a top restaurant and venue in the Baltimore area. Beginning on January 1, 2019, our team's recommended action program should be implemented. This action program should last until July 1, 2019. Our hope is that the action program proves to be a success, and after the six-month marketing campaign, Zen West adopts our strategy and continues to use it for the rest of the 2019 year and into the future.

Evaluation

When will this campaign commence? Our team's Zen West campaign will begin on January 1, 2019 and run until July 1, 2019. During this six-month time span, Zen West will evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing strategy and report their findings back to use once a month on February 1, March 1, April 1, May 1, and June 1. Once evaluations take place, our team will work closely with Zen West to find areas where the strategy can be changed or enhanced depending on the success seen from the action programs that we have implemented. If the campaign is successful, little changes will be needed. However, if the campaign does not see any tangible evidence of success, our team will work to ensure that Zen is being as competitive as possible, offering the best quality service, and we will find ways to increase efforts to ensure that the action programs shift to achieve the desired goals.

Control

Finally, the controls, which measure how the campaign is tracking, will include reviewing sales from Q1 and Q2 of 2018 and comparing them to the sales that the marketing campaign will produce during Q1 and Q2 of 2019. We will monitor sales in all areas of Zen West's product lines, including merchandise, food, drinks, venue rentals, and take out/delivery orders. Additionally, on nights where special themed events occur, we will be sure to monitor foot traffic to ensure that we are attracting large crowds for the different events. We will monitor social media engagement through Google Analytics, Facebook Analytics, and Instagram Analytics. These sites will help our team closely monitor the engagement that Zen sees with consumers online. From there, we can evaluate whether the social media marketing is successful or if it needs additional work to bring in clicks, gain followers, and gain shares from users.

Conclusion

Through the application of our action program, Zen West will surely achieve the short-term goals set for the next sixth months. Our team, Real Value, is looking forward to working

closely with Zen West and ensuring that Zen West creates an extraordinary experience for consumers by consistently delivering superior value to diners. Thank you for your time and we are excited to see the success of Zen West be achieved over the next six months!

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