

Problem Statement

Session Cocktails has periods of low foot traffic, specifically with under-reached demographics such as men aged 30+.

Introduction

Session Cocktails, a newly-founded downtown Auburn bar, has steadily built a reputation around its mission: “to create fantastic drinks, host amazing people, and develop a friendly atmosphere.” Known for its laid-back yet elevated cocktail experience, the bar sets itself apart from typical college-town bars by offering a unique environment and regularly partnering with nonprofits and community groups. In addition to these efforts, Session seeks to expand its customer base. The goal that Session wants to work towards is increasing overall foot traffic to the bar. Particularly, Session intends to foster more attention among underrepresented demographics and age groups, and for Session, that is, men and adults past their early twenties.

Currently, Session employs a variety of strategies to draw in customers. Its active presence on social media—especially Instagram and Facebook—helps promote seasonal drink menus, themed nights, and collaborations with local organizations. These platforms communicate updates and events, reinforcing Session’s personality and connection to its audience. Based on our research, Instagram, in particular, has proven to be the most engaging platform. With little in-bar signage of specialties, social media is the customers' primary source of information. The bar also regularly introduces specialty drinks and seasonal menus to keep what they offer fresh and appealing to returning guests. In addition, Session maintains strong community ties by working with nonprofits to host events that give back to local causes, boosting brand equity and goodwill.

Secondary Research

To better understand what strategies may be effective in increasing foot traffic, it's helpful to look at what other brands have done in similar situations. Brooklyn Brewery, for example, launched a campaign called "The Story of Brooklyn," which aimed to expose customers to the history and culture of the borough. Using storytelling, vibrant visuals, and partnerships, such as a collaboration with director Spike Lee, the brewery positioned itself as not just a beverage brand but a cultural ambassador. The success of this campaign was rooted in its ability to tie the brand to a deeper narrative and identity. This case suggests that Session could similarly benefit from embracing storytelling—perhaps by highlighting the stories behind its cocktails, spotlighting staff, or celebrating Auburn culture creatively. Storytelling for Session could be highly effective when working with the community partners they support with their ongoing "Cocktails 4 a Cause" campaign.

Yee-Haw's key stakeholders are owners Joe and Jessie Baker, their employees, and the community. Due to its partnership with the University, Tennessee fans are also stakeholders. Joe Baker said, "Tennessee just finished their best year in athletics ever, and we couldn't be prouder to join the team. Jessi and I have been cheering for the Vols since we could walk, and now being their partner is a dream come true." Tennessee fans and the community reacted positively to this campaign and were excited to see their team represented on the drinks. This partnership connects Yee-Haw to the University, which connects them to the town and state. This was an excellent campaign for them to expand their awareness.

Primary Research

Of course, any effective strategy must begin with a well-versed understanding of the audience and stakeholders. We conducted a survey and a series of interviews to gather these insights. Our survey was open from March 16th to 20th, received 77 responses, and featured a mix of multiple-choice, ranking, and open-ended questions. The interview process included eight participants in total. The questions were designed to identify demographics, behaviors, and perceptions related to Session Cocktails.

Our findings from our survey respondents gave us unsurprising, yet helpful, feedback about how to understand the audience better that Session is working with. First, there was a notable gender gap among customers—78% of respondents were women, while only 22% were men. This imbalance suggests a key area for growth: attracting more male customers. Additionally, the vast majority of respondents (69%) were between the ages of 21 and 22, with very few from older age groups. This shows that Session’s appeal is concentrated in a narrow college-age demographic, which could present a sustainability challenge as these customers graduate and move away.

Despite these limitations, the overall sentiment toward Session was positive. When asked about their likelihood to attend, 43% said they were “somewhat likely” and 34% said “extremely likely.” Similarly, 51% of respondents said they were “highly likely” to recommend Session to others. These numbers indicate that while Session has built a solid reputation, it may not be at the top of people's minds when choosing where to go.

Another noteworthy insight came from questions about social media engagement. Only 34% of respondents follow Session on any platform, and everyone follows the bar on Instagram. This suggests that Instagram is the most effective channel for outreach, but the overall reach is

still limited. To address this, Session should consider ramping up content creation, collaborating with local influencers, or launching targeted ad campaigns on the platform to boost visibility.

Regarding local competition, respondents were asked to rank bars with a similar audience. Session was ranked as the top choice by 25 participants, closely followed by Avondale with 24. This close ranking indicates that Avondale is Session's most immediate competitor and should be monitored closely when planning campaigns or promotions.

Event attendance was another area that revealed room for improvement. Of the 77 respondents, only 25 had attended a Session-hosted event. However, among those who hadn't participated, 31% said they would be "extremely likely" to go to one in the future. This finding points to a clear opportunity: increase awareness and promotion of events, which could convert interest into actual visits. With more effective communication and strategic timing, Session could drive higher event turnout and deepen customer relationships.

The survey also asked about drink preferences, and the results were precise: 92% of patrons go to Session for cocktails. Beer and wine lagged far behind, with mocktails receiving zero votes. These insights reaffirm that Session's brand identity is firmly rooted in cocktails, and the menu should continue to reflect that focus. Promotions, new menu launches, and seasonal drinks should emphasize cocktails first and foremost.

One logistical issue that emerged was wait times. While 52% of respondents reported waiting 15–30 minutes for a table and 39% reported no wait, a small number indicated waits of up to an hour or more. As Session works to increase traffic, it must also plan for the operational impact. If wait times grow too long without a streamlined process, it could deter potential guests. Implementing a waitlist system, reservations, or text alerts could help improve this experience.

The root causes behind the foot traffic issue are relatively straightforward. The overwhelming majority of customers are women aged 21–22. This leaves out key demographics, including men and older adults, who may be just as interested in a cocktail lounge experience but aren't currently being reached. By tailoring campaigns to appeal to these groups, such as hosting events with a more gender-balanced appeal or targeting young professionals with after-work specials, Session could significantly broaden its reach.

Similar findings were collected through the interviews we conducted. Our interviewees were asked: What was your experience with the session on social media? How often do you see the posts on your feed? What are the reasons you go to Sessions? What type of drinks have you liked? Would you attend another Auburn downtown bar over Session Cocktails? If so, why? What makes Session Cocktails stand out to you? With these questions, we could find the “why” behind the behaviors we had observed with our surveys.

When asked, “What makes Session Cocktails stand out to you?” one interviewee shared that she enjoys the calmer atmosphere Session has compared to many other downtown Auburn bars. Others shared similar statements, and compared to competitors like Avondale or the Collegiate, having wait times makes a big difference for them. Multiple interviewees shared that while they like Session, it is typically a bar to “warm up” with and is usually not the last stop of the night. One shared that she and her friends often go to Session if there is no wait, and then move to another location afterwards. Another finding shared through the interviews was the appeal of the seasonal drink menu that Session often features. One interviewee shared that although she doesn't usually attend Sessions due to their pricier menu items, she will always go for their seasonal menu. For example, this past winter Session offered a sugar cookie martini, which the interviewee shared was her primary motivation to attend Session.

Key Stakeholders

Partnerships will support efforts to gain a customer base with low existing demographics. Auburn University fraternities offer one way to draw in more male patrons. Collaborating on open tab nights, game day events, or co-branded parties could help Session engage with a new crowd and diversify its customer base. Conversely, local businesses that employ young professionals represent an untapped opportunity. Partnering on networking nights, corporate happy hours, or loyalty programs could bring in an older demographic and increase off-peak traffic during weekdays.

Session Cocktails has a strong foundation—great drinks, community involvement, and a distinct atmosphere. The next step is to build on this foundation with targeted efforts that engage new publics, better promote events, and refine the social media presence. By learning from successful campaigns like Brooklyn Brewery’s and listening to its customers, Session is well-positioned to grow its reach and become a go-to destination for a wider audience.

Through strategic storytelling, thoughtful partnerships, and more innovative outreach, Session Cocktails has the tools to transform curiosity into loyalty and occasional visits into consistent foot traffic.