



Spoke N Spoon
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Integrative Project

The spoke: Twenty minutes of walking through the dusty, bustling, excruciatingly loud streets, welcomed an exhausting day of class and intense heat in Bangalore, India. Lunch was time to refuel, to appreciate a balanced and thoughtfully crafted meal, and to socialize. It didn't happen when the clocks struck twelve, it happened when the man showed up on his bike carrying bags that overflowed with India's famous tiffin boxes, or "dabas". Made of stainless steel, these re-useable lunch pails brought us warm meals that we shared at small tables, fingers tearing apart warm chapattis to scoop up spicy curry dishes, supplying our energy for the rest of the day. I later found out that these meals were similar to those consumed midday all over Mumbai through a system of Dabawalas, or lunch pail men. Employing over 5,000 mostly illiterate Dabawalas, roughly 1,000,000 lunches are delivered weekly with an average of only four mistakes each month (DabbaWala Indian).

The spoon: 7am, Marquette, Michigan, I changed clothes in the barn loft and walked barefoot through the grass down to the kitchen. The others wandered in, brushing teeth, making breakfast, drinking tea, and discussing the day ahead of us. By 8:00 am our calloused feet carried us to the dew-covered fields where we worked through changing shadows, increasing heat, and a transfixing show of fluffy clouds that moved across the immense, blue sky. The food we ate, we grew, harvested, and prepared. We had weeded the fields for weeks and harvested the fresh vegetables and herbs for our lunches, dinners, and for the mobile kitchen where we served others. This farm created an appreciation in me for wholesome, real food and the people who devote their lives to growing it.



(Figure-1, inspired by the lunch pail men, working on an organic farm, and designs by Marije Vogelzang)

Combining my experience of lunch in India with what I learned and felt on the farm, my senior thesis brought ideas from across the world into one small

studio in one environmentally conscious town. These ideas became Spoke N Spoon, business and design.

The business: “Eco-friendly, local fare delivered to your desk”. Spoke N Spoon is a lunch subscription service delivering a rotating menu of local food to hungry Ann Arborites by bike. The goal is to create a lunch option of wholesome, local food that rivals fast food in convenience and accessibility.



(Figure-2. The menu to food preparation, to packaging, to delivery, five weeks of trial runs.)

I used a few methods to organize my plans for Spoke N Spoon. I laid out a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis with the help of Julie Mann, my coach from the Great Lakes Entrepreneurship Quest, and I constantly referred to a book entitled *The Big Picture* to lie out a much more detailed business model. It walked me through the stages of business design and after defining and understanding the main and dynamic variables of my business,

I was able to refer back to my target audience at every stage of the design. I also spent many hours talking with Cheryl Wiese from the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan who worked with me to create a survey I used to poll individuals working in Ann Arbor offices. These surveys provided critical insight into my target audience's habits, attitudes, and behaviors specific to lunch. I discovered, for example, that most of my target market has less than an hour for lunch, and many continue working through their lunch “break”. The majority of those surveyed described lunch eaten at their desk while multitasking. With this information, I began five weeks of trial runs, where working individuals would place an order via an online menu (Figure 2) and would receive a local lunch delivered to his or her desk the following afternoon.

By the end of the trials, over \$500 had been spent on these lunches, equaling about 50 delivered lunches. Although this was successful, I was working with only one local caterer, and it became important to dictate that this would be a rotating menu from many local eateries. Inspiration from NetFlix and Cheese of the Month clubs directed my business into a lunch subscription service. This places the business into a new category and out of direct competition with established lunch restaurants in the area.

Critical to Spoke N Spoon as a business, is the importance of local and wholesome food, running an environmentally friendly business, and bridging the gap between Ann Arbor offices and Ann Arbor farms. Buying local is more than just a trend, it's an essential part of our economy. Of every \$100 spent at a big

box retail store, only \$14 goes back into the local economy, whereas \$45 of the same \$100 purchase at a local retailer goes directly back into the local economy (Sherwood Gazette). On top of economic benefits, local food is often wholesome and organic, delivering an array of benefits to our health and to the Earth. Organic family farms tend to use less fuel, less water, and less pesticides, ultimately creating a much smaller impact on the planet than larger, conventional farms (What is Local?). By promoting these family farms and keeping an environmentally conscious business, Spoke N Spoon hopes to increase accessibility to this food throughout Ann Arbor.

The design: Consulting my favorite design blogs while branching out to explore new ones, I began by designing a simple black and white logo, which could be made into a rubber stamp. I have always been inspired simple designs, because of their effectiveness when done well. I took a more abstract route, and steered myself away from the literal imagery of a bike spoke and a spoon, for saying the words and showing the images become repetitive. From the logo, I went on to design a number of traditional and digital promotional materials, as well.

I incorporated feedback from my peers, professors, and other designers, while exploring new media and processes (letterpress, cutouts, stamping, and collage). From the black and white logo shown in Figure-3, I created a rubber stamp, which I use for lunch bags, napkins, and other materials. For further promotional materials, I incorporated a color palette from earthy tones of water

and harvests experienced on the farm. Working with the same aesthetic of the business card, I designed the website, mobile application, bike banner, T-shirt, canvas bag, etc (Figure 3-5).



(Figure-3. Lunch pail used in India and Spoke N Spoon's current packaging)

Not only did I find myself constantly checking in with current events in the digital and social media realm (via Emarketer, Advertising Age, Wall Street Journal), but I studied the process of design for these elements (mobile devices, websites, etc). I defined Spoke N Spoon's potential customers by creating personas to guide my design. This allowed me to understand each step the user has to take in order to accomplish his or her different goals. This process was completely new to me, but I found the business courses I had taken to be extremely helpful. I also re-visited the resources I had been given while in a User Interface Design class at Shristi school of Art, Design, and Technology in India. I met and spoke with Marije Vogelzang, an eating designer, which inspired me

throughout the project, for her refreshing, fun take on what can be difficult, and seemingly hopeless problems related to food and the way people eat (Figure-1 right image). I was lucky enough to have critiques with Hook and QLTD, two local design firms, one focused more on traditional media, the other on digital, where constructive criticism and a deep understanding of the industry helped guide my design.



(Figure-5. Design of the mobile application for Spoke N Spoon)

As the design began to fall into place, I started taking materials and processes into consideration. I worked with Modati, a local screen printing company to print with water-based-ink on organic cotton shirts. The business cards and invitations are printed on two types of paper, one has seeds in the paper and can be planted, while the other is made entirely of elephant dung (which is mostly broken down vegetation). The seeded paper is more for the promotion of the business, but the elephant dung paper is an interesting substitute for paper made from trees. It's important to begin thinking of ways to minimize printing and paper use, for the current speed of deforestation is frightening continues to grow. In 2005, paper consumption had grown 154% in

the United States, from 1961, and this is a continuing trend. Estimations believe that nearly 20% of deforestation goes towards supplying the world with paper (Vance). These numbers got me interested in looking at other materials to print on, and I would like to continue this search.



(Figure-4. Designing different elements of Spoke N Spoon)

Spoke N Spoon began as a quest that grew into a reality. It brought together the community of Ann Arbor with the University in Ann Arbor, and it helped bridge the gap between urban and rural realities. It provided local, wholesome food to those displaced from home and low on time during the week.

Spoke N Spoon was not a project, it was an experience. I found myself in all sorts of situations that never could have existed without it. One day I was teaching people how to make sauerkraut at a Free Skool event. The next day, I was packing warm, fresh lunches into the milk crate behind the seat of my bike,

getting ready for the windy, fall ride out to Morgan and York's. The final exhibition brought the University of Ann Arbor together with the local community. It took place at Pot & Box and invited those who share an interest in local food to celebrate together.

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