



CASE STUDY

How Brookings, South Dakota, Keeps Pulse on Local Economy During COVID-19 Pandemic

Brookings, South Dakota, has a unique demographic makeup. Home of South Dakota State University, nearly half of the community's population, which numbers more than 25,000, is made up of students. It is the epitome of a college town. But more than that, it is also a highly entrepreneurial community. As the second largest employer of manufacturing – second only to Sioux Falls, which is the largest Metro and employment center in South Dakota – Brookings has a vibrant economy and was named the 16th best performing micropolitan in the country in 2020.



Wanting to maintain this positive momentum during the national economic crisis caused by COVID-19, Brookings partnered with Buxton – a leader in consumer data analytics – to better understand how their economy has been affected by the pandemic.

Implementing the Consumer Impact Dashboard

In response to COVID-19, Buxton developed the Consumer Impact Dashboard, which provides a window into local consumer behavior trends by business type and by consumer type. The release

of this dashboard garnered the attention of the Brookings Economic Development Corporation (BEDC).

Believing it important to be open and honest with the residents of Brookings about the impact of COVID-19, the BEDC – together with the city, the Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Brookings Convention and Visitors Bureau – developed the concept “together Brookings.”

PROFILE:

Vibrant micropolitan with more than 25,000 residents

OBJECTIVE:

Understand how retail sector was affected by COVID-19 pandemic

RESULTS:

Monitored changes in consumer activity and enhanced communication with stakeholders

This then led to the development of the website togetherbrookings.com, which leverages the data from the Consumer Impact Dashboard.

Togetherbrookings.com tracks employment, construction, and sales revenue, as well as provides updates on local prevention efforts to keep the community informed. BEDC also identified four key business categories – restaurants, grocery stores, general merchandising, and building materials – that are updated each week using the consumer behavior trend graphs from the dashboard, which “shows how residents are responding to the city ordinance and to COVID-19 in general,” says the BEDC Marketing Director, Kristi Larsen.

Empowering City Leaders

While keeping the community informed was certainly a priority, Brookings also sought to maintain the economic success that they had achieved over the past few years. As such, projecting sales revenue via the traffic trends in the Consumer Impact Dashboard became essential.

Without the dashboard, the BEDC and their partners would have had to rely on their actual sales revenue data. “I know our city, our city manager, and the council have been very interested in seeing the real time traffic trends because our actual sales revenue data we get is so delayed,” commented Larsen.

Rather than relying on anecdotal accounts, Brookings uses the Consumer Impact Dashboard’s powerful visuals to answer important questions about consumer activity.

In addition to tracking sales revenue, Brookings also needed to understand the consumer activity driving the sales. This is made even easier with the trend graphs, which are both quick and easy to understand. Rather than rely on anecdotal accounts about how the parking lot of Lowe’s seems busier than normal or how downtown seems empty, Brookings can use powerful visuals to answer important questions about consumer activity.

Key Insights

One of the important questions for which Brookings needed an answer was which business categories have struggled and which have thrived during COVID-19. As expected, grocery stores and general merchandising – both essential business categories – have done well. What Brookings didn’t expect was the success of building materials and supply stores, which have seen a significant spike in activity during the pandemic with sales up 11%.

“The dashboard supports our conclusions that there has definitely been increased activity at Lowe’s and the sales tax show that as well. Plus, it’s important,” said Larsen, “because building materials and supplies accounts for a good percentage of our overall retail sales revenue.”

Insights such as this help Brookings during the immediate crisis but also prepare for the months ahead, and it is because of these insights that Brookings looks forward to continuing their partnership with Buxton.

If your community needs help understanding the economic impact of shifting consumer activity, contact Buxton today to learn how our products can help.