

Strategic Management for SMEs

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Introduction

The primary objective is to analyse and critically assess a small to medium sized enterprise will be carried out. A wide range of methods to carry out both an internal and external analysis will be conducted to study influences of strategic importance and its effects on the organisation in order to become a more sustainable entity.

The PESTLE and Porters Five Forces will be at the basis of the external analysis as its properties allow an in-depth investigation into influences from a perspective that can be only observed from outside an organisation. The SWOT analysis will on the other hand be carried out to examine from an internal approach that will aid in creating a better dynamic in occurrence with both methods. As a result of each finding, appropriate recommendations are to be provided accompanied with a detailed rationale for its endorsement. **Chicken.com**, an SME fast-food chain will be at the forefront of this analysis.

Company Overview

Chicken.com is a fast-food restaurant that prioritizes the sale of street food such as fries, burgers and fried chicken. Currently, Chicken.com has over 5 chains that is located within Birmingham. Although they are in possession of multiple chains, they are an SME due to them having a small employee count that is under 250. An SME is categorized by the Policy Research Working Paper (Ayyagari, et al., 2003) as small to medium sized enterprises that has less than 250 employees, Chicken.com has an estimate of 50 across all outlets.

In 2008, the owners of Chicken.com acquired permission to franchise a Dixies Chicken located in Small Heath. This allowed the owners to gain an entry into the market using a well-known brand known as Dixies. The store proved early success, having a surge in popularity with a healthy financial growth. However, due to the high fees in licensing costs, the business soon became unsustainable. This put the company at a crossroad, whether they could maintain the low profit margin, ultimately deciding to suspend the Dixies licensing and to venture out with a rebranding of their own; Chicken.com. This proved to be a gamble for the company as they were no longer part of the Dixy branding, however, they were able to retain a large portion of their customer base due to maintaining the quality of service. With the newfound success of Chicken.com, this gave confidence to the owners to expand their business into different locations in the Birmingham area.

Strategic Direction

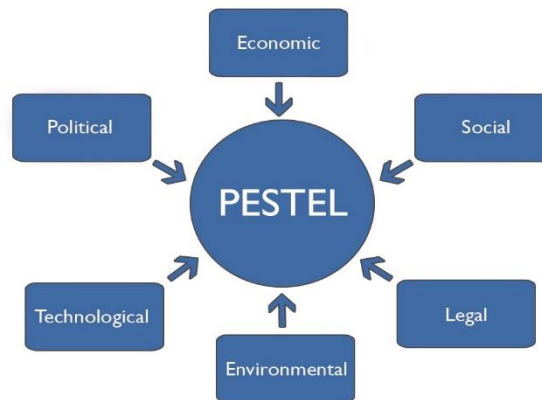
The current strategic direction Chicken.com is seen as quite basic, that heavily relies on sales of mass quantity. From an operational point of view, Chicken.com is seen as quite successful, having a total of 5 branches. Currently having no established mission statement, expansion has been identified as a key milestone for the future. Having a defined mission statement would enable Chicken.com to strive to new heights and focus on evolution

The organisation thrives on its unique food preparation and the use of quality ingredients, giving it a competitive edge. At present, Chicken.com does not have its very own online website which shows the lack of oversight. It is however a costly investment to create and upkeep, something that may not be appetizing at the current time. To substitute this absence, social media as a free alternative have been set up to provide an online presence with very little interactivity, although a website in future way be implemented.

As it is a small to medium sized enterprise, human resources are nonexistent and is often performed by the managing director or branch managers. This has in turn affected hiring staff and has therefore relied on friends and family to take up positions. With this practice, the organisation recruits unsuitable candidates who may not be sufficiently trained, resulting in poor performance. Implementing a digitized jobs board should expand their search greatly and allow proper examination of candidates, something that has been conceptualized by Chicken.com in the future. Similarly, payroll responsibilities again are currently carried out by the managers as there's no official method of payment as payments are made to employees in cash every week. A digital method would help create a more streamlined approach that would see all employees paid simultaneously on schedule.

PESTLE Analysis

PESTLE is an acronym that looks to assess 6 different sectors that influences an organisation. The 6 sectors are **Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental** (Perera, 2017).



Political

With the effects of Brexit, the prices of importing key ingredients have dramatically increased and has made it significantly harder for companies in the United Kingdom (Clarke, et al., 2017). A company like Chicken.com relies on the sales of food at affordable prices, however with Brexit, outsourcing ingredients outside the UK meant the cost of goods such as potatoes and cooking oil will be increased and therefore passed on to its customers (Andreas Oehler, 2017).

In recent times, the British Government has expressed concern regarding obesity and has targeted fast foods as the contributing factor (Pierre Chandon, 2007). After identifying these issues, the Government has tried to implement measures to combat its mass appeal. An example of this can be seen through the limiting of fast-food advertisements on TV during the allotted time frame of 9PM to 5:30AM (Agnieszka Jaworowska, 2013). Although Chicken.com does not produce televised advertisements, it can indirectly affect them due to the negative portrayal of fast food as an industry.

In 2018, as part of the anti-obesity campaign, the Government has introduced a tax on all sugary products with the aim to detour customers from consuming anything with a high sugar content. This law opens pathways for other taxation opportunities, for example a junk food tax which has been rumored for some time, which if implemented would be a devastating blow to Chicken.com as it is the fundamental core of the business (S. E. Fleischhacker, 2011).

Economic

The fast-food industry thrives on easily accessible food, making it is very cheap to produce and sell. Although it is unhealthy, the demand is very high due to its intricacy required to create. Unlike healthy food, it provides very little nutritional properties but makes up for it in its cheaper pricing. As stated by Gwen Chapman, healthier alternatives are more expensive to produce due to overhead costs through agricultural means (Gwen Chapman, 1993). It was found that unemployment was a contributing factor when it comes to purchasing power of the consumer (Stacey R. Finkelstein, 2010).

In essence it meant that with high unemployment, customers became more financially aware and were limited in their spending of luxuries. The cost of healthy foods meant that those with a disposable income could afford the products, alternatively fast foods produced by Chicken.com meant that it was affordable with a very small profit margin. The fast-food chain had recognized this and concluded that it was sustainable through the sale of goods at high volumes.

As an organisation within the UK, businesses are subjected to tax laws such as corporation tax and VAT. Set by the UK Government, businesses must be compliant with this legal requirement. Currently corporation tax is set to 19% which means a company such as Chicken.com yearly profits will be drastically affected as it now becomes a form of unexpected expense that needs to be factored in.

Social

For any business, marketing is a form of brand awareness and is therefore been categorized as a critical technique to influence people's way of thinking. It has been found that an effective branding campaign had the ability to bring exposure in an effort to drive product and services (Goodheart - Willcox co. inc, 2009). Although it is an expensive albeit a risky strategy, it has the potential to reap in benefits. A cost effective yet essential method in the current business climate is the use of social media as a form of advertisement. It was found that at the time approximately 78% of organisations utilized a form of social media as their primary source of marketing though it is predicted the adoption rate has been significantly increased since last recorded (Arca, 2012).

With the ever-increasing reliance on the internet, an online presence is essential and should be commonplace in all businesses as it creates a digital footprint and a mode of interactivity between the customer and the company. At the time of reporting, Chicken.com fail to deliver a dedicated website to promote their business, however do have Facebook page to supplement the lack of an online presence. It is plausible, the high cost in website upkeep and maintenance deterred the organisation away towards a more cost-effective solution.

Technological

In the fast-food industry, technological advances can play a huge role. Due to the easily accessible nature of the internet, people have the ability to place orders from local restaurants through their dedicated website, however with lack of online presence, Chicken.com must rely on these third-party platforms such as Just Eat or Uber Eats to provide a service to create exposure. Although commission can be costly, Just Eat is a British company that focuses on the delivery of food services; however, a restaurant must be registered with Just Eat in-order to use their services.

Sometimes businesses do not offer home deliveries as it can eat into their profit margin due to additional overhead costs and the pricing of fuel. However, with Just Eat, restaurants can utilise external drivers to have their food delivered for a much cheaper price. As the Just Eat marketplace is accessed through the internet, customers have the ability to browse through different restaurants based on the area code they are located in whilst also providing them the option of making online payments directly from their VISA/Debit cards. This ultimately revolutionized the fast-food industry as the mechanism of logistics of getting food from the business to customer was solved. Ideal for Chicken.com as originally, they lacked employees to carry out logistical tasks which contributed to an essential part of their business.

Legal

A business in the fast-food industry is subjected to a host of legal requirements for example nutritional and allergen specifications. By law it is common practice to display clear signage of possible food allergies such as food containing nuts (Scott H. Sicherer MD, 2010). This information is vital and could be life threatening which would be catastrophic for businesses.

An incident regarding to this scenario occurred in 2016 when a customer with a nut allergy consumed food containing nuts without her knowledge which resulted in a fatality. Pret a Manger, responsible for this casualty was heavily criticized for its lax approach and have shown interest in publishing the full ingredient list of its products to avoid a similar disaster. This also prompted the British Government to review food labeling laws that impacted the whole industry.

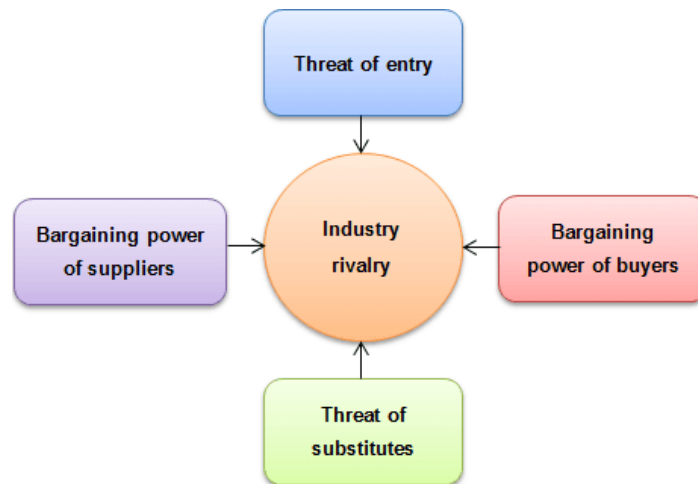
Within the food industry, a high level of hygiene practice is a legal requirement in regards to food safety. It tackles 3 main principles which are handling, preparing and storing. This ensures that businesses are following strict guidelines to warrants safe consumption of their foods. Licensing to trade can be revoked if the business was to become negligible in its attitude to maintaining these hygiene practices. Chicken.com boasts a 4 out 5 stars in its drive to ensure its food is fit for consumption, though the room for improvement is always to strive for.

Environmental

The fast-food industry is notorious for its huge implication of environmental issues and has been a catalyst for a host of waste it typically generates. From the use of cheaply produced plastic and polystyrene, it has become the main form of packaging for its products. Although it is seen as a cheap alternative substitute, the long-term implication meant that it was environmentally damaging due to its status as a non-biodegradable (Laurel A. Schaider, 2017). The industry contributed to tons of waste which only highlights the severity of this situation is (Stenmarck Å, 2016).

Companies have recognized this and have started to focus on more recyclable alternatives such as paper or card-based packaging in an effort to limit the level of waste produced. Though it was found that this method was generally more expensive, large businesses were in favour of this change to positively portray their business as environmentally friendly (Wilk, 2006). Small businesses like Chicken.com unfortunately have yet to adopt a more sustainable packaging because of its high costs.

Porters Five Forces



Threat of New Entry - High

The threat of new entry is seen as high due to the industry being highly saturated. Regardless of this, new competitors will enter the market especially due to the fact a relatively low requirements are needed to replicate the base of an organisation and has a linear operational business characteristic. This means that alternative businesses wouldn't require much resources to start trading. The primary barrier to entry is the upfront cost of real estate and assets such as machinery which is mass produced that can be easily sourced.

In the same manner, Chicken.com started as an organisation as a new entity which has since expanded into a chain of 5 outlets. New organisations have already been aware of the alarming rate of competitions and have been diversifying to incorporate a more unique product line such as gourmet and healthy foods to retain their competitive edge. This would weaken Chicken.com as new competitors could entice the customers away.

Bargaining Power of Buyers – High

Bargaining power of buyers for Chicken.com is high because of its generic product line currently on offer and its small customer base. The food can be replicated and marketed cheaper than its rival which would require Chicken.com to reduce prices in order to remain competitive giving the customers the power to indirectly influence pricing. In regards to some of the big brands such as McDonald's, do not share this power as they are a well-established entity that boasts an unprecedented amount of customers. This means that, the company are in firm control of bargaining power as there is not a big enough resistance to create change that would affect their operations. In relation to Chicken.com, customers are not bound to 1 organisation and can choose alternatives which would damage the company financially.

Threat of Substitutes – High

In the fast-food sector, the products are often generic and provide a poor nutritional value. With this in mind, customers may seek to prepare their own meals in a similar fashion with the use of quality ingredients, such as healthier oils. This means the threat of substitutes is high. Although Chicken.com produce a premium quality of products, it can be easily replicated at the comfort of the customer's home.

Bargaining Power of Suppliers – Low

The fast-food industry traditionally requires ingredients that are very common to acquire, meaning the supplier power is categorized as low. In this market, key ingredients such as fresh produce and cooking oils are easily sourced meaning it gives the organisation like Chicken.com to switch to suppliers that offer the best rates and incentives to increase their profit margins. Suppliers are therefore in competition among themselves to produce prices that are affordable which naturally drives the price down which benefits Chicken.com. Alternatively, if the business did require specialised goods, the supply chain would become very limited handing the bargaining power to the suppliers.

Industry Rivalry - High

The threat of rivalry is seen as high because new emerging brands are always entering the market, increasing competitions. Within the industry, it is highly saturated with multiple big competitors such as McDonald's, Burger King, KFC. Chicken.com who operates within the same market face challenges that affect their organisations in terms of growth and profits. In light of this, Chicken.com must evolve and look for innovation in its product line to diversify out and attempt to look at new markets.

Although Chicken.com have a number competitors, it can also help implement a new way of thinking that can only drive their business forward. Within the industry, technological advancement has been a major catalyst in the industries evolution which only highlighted its fierce competition. In recent times, big branded fast-food chains such as McDonalds have implemented a method of ordering through digital screens and so called “Drive Thru” which allows customers to make their food orders through the comfort of their cars (Gad Allon, 2011). Though these methods are at the forefront of fast-food technologies it has been found to be very costly and not beneficial for small chains like Chicken.com.

Both Uber Eats and Just Eat allow customers to browse the different types of food they are in the mood for, for example if they wanted fried chicken, a number of shops would appear to choose from. This is a beneficial move especially for Chicken.com as it can act as free publicity, and if customers enjoy their food and no longer wish to use apps such as Just Eat, they will be more inclined to visit the various different branches of Chicken.com without having to pay extra for service charges and delivery, not to mention that sometimes the menu varies in pricing and can be cheaper for both the consumer and business.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis, Abbreviated as Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats, is a method used to investigate both an internal and external approach of an organisation that would be vital in making tough decisions (Hill, 1997).

Internal	Strength	Weakness
	○ Well-known brand locally ○ Affordably priced goods ○ Quick and easy to prepare	○ Very unhealthy food ○ Not difficult to replicate ○ Lack of product diversification
External	Opportunities	Threats
	○ Building a brand image ○ Explore healthy eating ○ Loyalty schemes	○ Highly saturated market ○ Vast array of competitors

Strength

Chicken.com boasts a brand that is recognizable albeit locally, the company has since utilized this popularity to capture a customer base as their preferred place to eat. It has been reported that a well-established brand has the ability to create an awareness of lasting appeal that aids businesses to thrive upon and often is credited for its success (David A. Aaker, 2010). A vital strength of the organisation is its ability to produce an affordable menu that encourages customers of all socio demographics to make purchases of their products. The concept of this, allows Chicken.com to prioritize sales of mass quantities to increase profit margins. A redeeming factor of this is that all foods are very simple and quick to prepare as it is often generic and prepackaged ingredient that is easily sources. Other fast-food outlets follow a similar philosophy, as found by a leading fast-food business, McDonalds would outsource key ingredients to simplify its operation (Cavinato, 1989).

Weakness

A business operating within the fast-food industry is almost certainly responsible for exacerbating obesity. A study has shown that fast-food has a direct correlation to a host of health issues that sustained long term vulnerabilities such as diabetes and heart disease that can cause premature deaths (Ligia J. Dominguez, 2014).

As Chicken.com's primary selection relies on processed foods, health-conscious customers will feel the business fails to cater to their needs and as a result will search for alternatives. Although with the growing consensus from anti-obesity campaigner and governments, the fast-food industry has seen resistance for change which has impacted the industry greatly, however consumption rates have been rising on an annual basis which has only been negatively publicized (Sahasporn Paeratakul MBBS, n.d.). The lack of diversification means that Chicken.com risks polarizing and losing customers as a result.

Opportunities

Chicken.com have many opportunities when it comes to expanding their brand image. Already a somewhat known entity, Chicken.com possesses multiple branches although they are situated within Birmingham. The business can potentially expand to different cities such as London in an attempt to gain more credibility and grow the brand exponentially. Expanding organisation has been found to be amongst the best methods for brand exposure (Gráinne M. Fitzsimons, 2008).

In recent times, there has been a real shift towards the healthy eating market which has helped paved the way for new franchises to enter the market. According to a report by Polymeros, the healthy eating market is worth **707.12 billion U.S. dollars**, which can be a real opportunity for Chicken.com to start providing new healthy eating menus to expand on their product line (Polymeros Chrysochou, 2010).

This would allow new customers who maybe might have not considered the business as their preferred place to eat. Organisations have already started implementing this trend and have seen a significant increase in sales. An example of is McDonald's implementations of calory controlled meals (Linda Tapsell, 2009). Loyalty schemes have become commonplace within the industry, with many franchises adopting a their very own system that rewards continued customer service. Chicken.com could attempt to follow their very own scheme which may motivate customers to return.

Threats

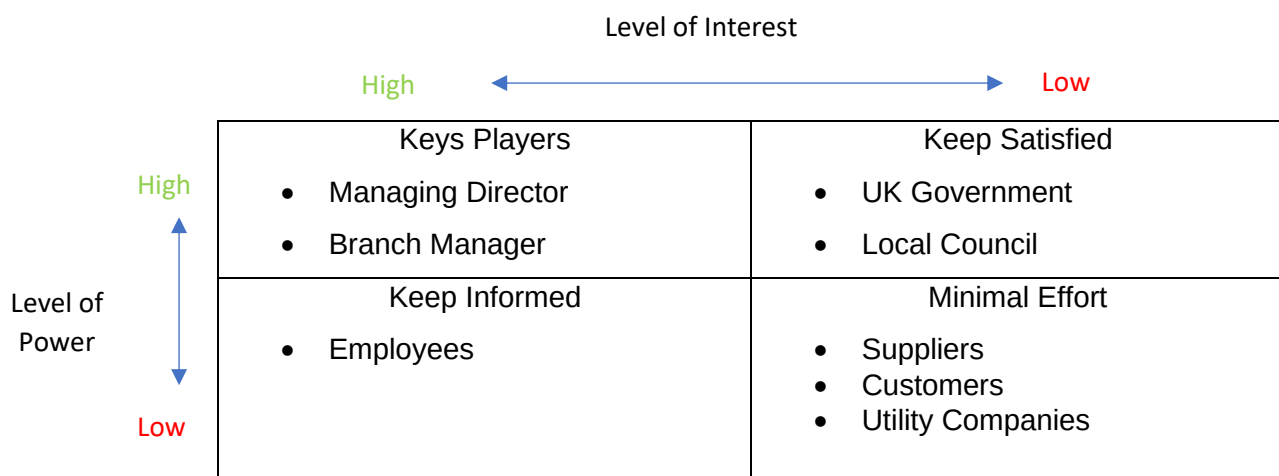
The fast-food industry is a highly saturated market that contains many big competitors. This is a growing threat to Chicken.com as they compete within the same market however lack many components to dominate. Other high profiled chains are in possession of a financial power that dwarf its smaller rivals in comparison.

This benefit allows these competitors to heavily invest in new technologies and advertisement that draws in more customers which is very damaging to smaller businesses. Competitors such as McDonald's is said to be worth over \$170B and is ranked 10th most valuable corporations in the world (Royle, 2000). With the ever-increasing fast-food industry, new competitors are always entering creating more saturation which only seems to harm the small to medium sized franchises such as Chicken.com.

Stakeholder Map

A stakeholder map is used to identify current stakeholders and how they affect an organisation. According to Freeman, the main purpose of a stakeholder's map is to get a theoretical depiction of the importance people may have on businesses whether it be externally or internally (Freeman, 1984). In a study by Juha Kettunen, it is stated that people often tend to get confused between stakeholders and shareholders. Whilst similar in nature, shareholders own a share of the organisation and have direct influence on the day-to-day ordeals, whereas stakeholders are known to work indirectly. These are people who are interested in an organisation and how well that organisation is doing (Kettunen, 2014). Utilizing a matrix proposed by Mendelow, stakeholders can be visualized on a graph showing their importance in terms of power and interests within the organisation.

Stakeholder Power / Interest Grid



Once the Mendelow Matrix was implemented for Chicken.com, it showed a clear imagery of the key stakeholders and the level of power and interest each participant are categorized under. As a small and medium sized enterprise with 5 franchises, the managing director along side the branch manager was deemed the key players of the organisation. Naturally, the managing director was ranked above as they were in a position that owns Chicken.com and therefore would wield a very high level of power and interest towards the business. With many outlets, the managing director would deputize trusted individuals to act as a branch manager to oversee day to day operations, similarly would have equal attributes to the managing director who is responsible for the entirety of the organisation.

Employees are a key stakeholder within Chicken.com as they are the backbone on any organisation. Although the employees may possess high interests, often they have very little power to enforce changes. This may be due to the fact that a successful business means their job is secure but are in no position of authority. They are however to be informed in order to keep up to date and to react to changes set by their managers.

Customers are seen to be having very little power as well as a very little interest in regards to the business. The customer who are the main contributors to the success of any organisation have no real power to make changes directly, however can influence change through a collective medium. Similar to customers, the suppliers will have interests albeit it being low towards the organisation as they will be reliant for their continuous custom. Chicken.com's supplier for fresh potatoes will have low interests towards the business as they have no direct associations apart from relying on their custom to buy more ingredients, although they would be supplying to various other competitors.

Governments and local councils are ranked to possess some of the highest level of power over businesses but low in its interest. Regulations are a business requirement for all companies such as employee rights and taxations, which needs to be kept satisfied. These entities can intervene and potentially discipline businesses not adhering to their guidelines. Within the fast-food industry, hygiene practices are a requirement that is issued by governments and councils to ensure standards are being met for trading. In some cases, fines have been given out and in severe cases licenses have been revoked. Although the level of power is high, the level of interest is quite low.

Ansoff Matrix



Igor Ansoff created the Ansoff Matrix in 1957 to give businesses an idea on how they can expand and what risks may come alongside it. The Ansoff Matrix tool consists of four avenues; **Market penetration**, which monitors products and how well they are doing on the market (Nichter S. S., 2009). **Product development**, is the innovation of new products and items that may also be sold within an already existing market (Slovic, 2002). **Market development**, focuses on expanding into different markets using existing goods, and **Diversification**, which emphasizes on growing the business into different territories and market places via new innovating ideas (Sohn M. H., 2003).

Recommendations

Although Chicken.com is a fairly known fast-food organisation with 5 branches, they are all located in the Birmingham region. This means that the company is thriving within this area but can increase its customer base significantly by venturing outside to other neighboring cities such as London. This will enable Chicken.com to gain recognition to its overall brand like some of its biggest competitors such as McDonalds. A study has shown that McDonalds operates in over 100 countries and its net worth is reported to be valued at \$170B (Royle, 2000).

With the ever-increasing negative associations with fast-foods, menus offering a diverse product range has been proven to expand customer base exponentially. Chicken.com who provide the typical unhealthy variants, can explore healthier solutions such as plant-based substitutes. In doing so, could attract new customers that are more health conscious. The healthy eating industry is worth 707.12 billion U.S. dollars (Polymeros Chrysochou, 2010). This shows that the market is viable as an option for venturing into.

As highlighted of the colossal waste produced by fast-food industry, it has impacted the environment and contributed to carbon emissions at an alarming rate. Investment into clear and more sustainable alternatives can be introduced to help curb the affects of global warming. Major competitors such as Subways have adopted a paper-based packaging to combat this which has been positively received amongst its customer base. Chicken.com however are still reliant on its plastic and polystyrene cases due to its cheap manufacturing costs, although a biodegradable alternative in future will become more affordable.

Conclusion

Chicken.com, a small and medium sized enterprise was examined at length, exploring the organisation composition. Utilizing the Mendelow Matrix, key stakeholders were examined that influenced directly and indirectly of the business. It was found that the managing director wielded the greatest level of power with the highest influence. The importance of this shows that the leading figure of Chicken.com had the authority and vision for change.

Using a host of analysis models, an in-depth exploration of both internal and external factors was investigated. Industry standard tools such as the PESTLE analysis was carried out to gain external influences. It was found that the organisation has many barriers that were affecting Chicken.com such as the environmental factors. Waste was identified as a major issue across the industry which was a contributing factor to global warming and has since been exploring alternatives to help reduce the level of waste.

After applying the Porters five forces, it was found that Chicken.com were operating in a highly saturated market that only affects their growth. Although key methods were identified to help increase and expand their organisation. It was recommended incorporating a more healthier product line was seen to be a viable solution in an attempt to expand into different markets that would bring in more customers. The SWOT analysis helped identified many more opportunities that Chicken.com can venture into such as expansion into different cities.

It was concluded that a business such as Chicken.com lacked the basic fundamentals such as having dedicated online presence that many of its competitors have implemented. The lack of this element only demotes the organisations exposure; however, it was seen as critical for future implementations.

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