

## The AboutRedlands.com Survey: Some Preliminary Findings and Perspectives

During the month of December 2008 and for the first two weeks of January, 2009, subscribers were asked to respond to a survey posted online by AboutRedlands.com. Respondents were a sample from over 5,000 folks who signed up to receive monthly information “ABOUT Redlands,” in our newsletter. Newsletters About Redlands Online, were distributed via email to our proprietary list of community subscribers – each interested in receiving our newsletter of up-to-date information about our home town delivered to their personal computer. As a component of our online business, the newsletter has a 48% open rate. Of this number, almost 250 people *who care about Redlands*, took the time to complete the survey. Clearly, this large and special sample was vested enough to seek this local information, open the Newsletter and respond to a survey asking them about businesses in Redlands. These *stakeholders* have provided us with invaluable data regarding what they believe about and how they behave in relation to a wide sample of businesses in the community. This report presents an overview of what we have learned.

### The survey and the respondents.

The instructions for the survey indicated that “*We want to know what you think, hear your voice, and get your input to help Redlands thrive!*” As indicated, almost 250 subscribers responded. Most were female (85%), between 36 and 50 (37%) or 50 and over (48%) and reported family incomes of \$50-100,000 (39%) or over \$100,000 (40%). They responded to questions about how frequently (*Not at All, Occasionally, or Frequently*) they had eaten at, visited, or shopped at (respectively) a range of restaurants, nightlife/lounge establishments, or shops in Redlands. They were also asked to indicate the importance of factors that contributed to their restaurant choices and to indicate the local hotels where they have had out of town family or guests stay. Finally, they were also asked to respond to: “What can Redlands business owners do to create more traffic?” This report outlines respondents’ replies to this key latter question following an overview of the findings related to restaurants in Redlands. Restaurants were chosen for coverage herein as they were, as a group, indicated to be considerably more popular among respondents than businesses in the nightlife/lounge establishments, or shops in Redlands. The findings for the question of creating more traffic are pertinent across Redlands businesses.

### Restaurants.

Respondents were asked to indicate “how frequently you have eaten at each of the following restaurants in Redlands recently.” Most indicated that they ate at “Fast Food,” “Chain,” or “Pizza/Take Out” restaurants *Occasionally* (60%) or *Frequently* (22%). When compared to these widely used general restaurants categories (as a baseline for comparison) our Redlands restaurants actually look quite good! Across the local eateries included in the survey, an average of approximately 40% indicated that they ate *Occasionally* or *Frequently* at the 20 restaurants assessed. These ratings are impressive as several of the local eateries assessed were quite new, and have yet to be discovered by Redlands folks. More established restaurants were actually quite popular with respondents with, for example, a very high proportion (73%) of respondents indicating

that they ate at Martha Green’s The Eating Room *Occasionally* or *Frequently*. Also, approximately 50% of the respondents indicated that they ate at some of the more specialized restaurants in Redlands (for e.g., Isabellas and Claras).

The value of the information collected for individual business owners in Redlands is further indicated in the availability of a breakdown of results for each individual restaurant (as well as for the stores, nightlife/lounges, and hotels in the survey) by age and income categories of respondents. Responses to Martha Greene’s Eating Room are provided for illustrative purposes.

**The Eating Room: Percentage of Respondents by Age and Income**

**Respondent Age**

	<b>21-35</b>	<b>36-50</b>	<b>Over 50</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	46	25	22
<b>Occasionally</b>	43	40	39
<b>Frequently</b>	11	35	39

**Respondent Income**

	<b>Under \$50,000</b>	<b>\$50-100,000</b>	<b>Over \$100,000</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	44	30	23
<b>Occasionally</b>	48	39	41
<b>Frequently</b>	9	32	36

*Note:* Findings for many of the individual businesses (other specialty restaurants, shops, and nightlife/lounges) present more differentiated distributions by age and income than indicated in the example provided for the Eating Room. Of course, the findings for each establishment will be made available to the owners (without charge) upon their request.

When asked to indicate the importance of factors that contributed to their restaurant choices, as might be expected respondents indicated that each of the following was either “*somewhat*” or “*very*” important: Value (97%), Food Quality (99%) and Service (98%). Noise level was a consideration for about 80% of the respondents and Child Friendly for 42% - the latter presumably for those folks with children. Importantly, Location (i.e., read *Local*) was a factor for fully 83% of the folks completing the survey.

In sum, a relatively large proportion of our respondents indicated that they eat at established Redlands restaurants. They make their choices based on a restaurant’s food quality, value, service - and *location*. These findings are seen as encouraging for our local eateries. Notably, comments suggested that they were unfamiliar with some of the restaurants listed in the survey. As suggested below, greater visibility is required for these eateries, as well as for those that are already more established. This will contribute -

along with restaurant quality and Redlands location - to greater appreciation and concomitant popularity for our local restaurants.

#### What can Redlands business owners do to create more traffic?

More than 61% (151 of 246) of the folks who filled out the survey actually completed responses to this item. This high level of responding is consistent with the view that people filling out the survey were evidencing their investment in the community. There was a *clear* sense that respondents felt Redlands' business owners need to do more to create more traffic - and they provided a range of constructive suggestions to this end.

Ideas were offered with regard to increasing the visibility of businesses in our community and a need for "more buzz" about our town. Suggestions ranged from treating customers better, to looking to other communities for their approaches (e.g., Monrovia, Brea and Claremont), to providing coupons and/or discounts for local shoppers, and improving signage and store hours. Not surprisingly for those of us familiar with downtown Redlands, 24 of the respondents specifically mentioned the need for improved parking. Perhaps more pointedly, and more unexpectedly, about as many respondents (25) specifically suggested that in order to create more traffic, businesses in Redlands should *advertise*.

Respondents pointed to the need for local businesses to let the community *know about them* - that they were simply unaware of the range of businesses (stores, nightlife/lounges, hotels, and restaurants) right here, in Redlands. This is especially notable as our respondents would seem to be a particularly informed group. As one respondent put it, "Make me aware of what they have to offer. Most of the shops listed, I've never heard of." Another noted, "...this newsletter is great! I will be printing this survey to look up some of the businesses that I did not yet know!" As indicated, respondents offered a range of suggestions for informing the community about (i.e., marketing) local businesses - from mailers and fliers to local radio ads. Herein, several specifically acknowledged the importance of the online role that About Redlands.com is developing. Consistent with the need for establishing a more up to date, online, presence for businesses in Redlands, respondents' suggestions for advertising through emails are also consistent with our approach.

Limitations and final thought. Although respondents in our sample provided good ideas, reflecting their investment in Redlands by responding to the survey, the findings based on this sample probably over estimates actual restaurant and other store patronage by the more general Redlands population. Although somewhat limited by our sample and in other regards, the findings are informative and - precisely because of the characteristics of our respondents - provide us with useful insights helpful to business owners in our community. We do consider the survey to be a preliminary effort and look forward to addressing other pressing concerns of our community, particular the backbone of our community - our businesses, in future attempts to collect important information.

It should be noted that it has been our goal, from the inception of AboutRedlands .com and the distribution of the monthly newsletter, to serve the necessarily synergistic

relationship between the people of our community and the businesses that serve them. To this end, by providing our local businesses with an online presence and additional advertising opportunities, we have endeavored to help build the visibility and viability of businesses in Redlands. In turn, by building these bridges, by informing our community, it has been our goal to help Redlands thrive. This intention was integral to the development of our survey.