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evidence into ideas

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Project Brief



Summary

This project applies marketing science to the Traverse City, Michigan coffee category.

Using evidence from physical and mental availability, and brand distinctiveness, the project designs a campaign concept that increases awareness and accessibility for Higher Grounds Coffee.

The Problem

The Traverse City coffee market is crowded and competitive, with multiple local brands and national chains vying for attention. In a noisy environment, even strong local brands like Higher Grounds must work harder to stand out, be remembered, and attract new customers beyond their loyal base.

Objectives

1. Increase mental availability
2. Increase physical availability
3. Strengthen distinctive brand assets to differentiate Higher Grounds from competitors and reinforce category identity.

Target Audiences

1. Local residents and tourists in Traverse City who drink coffee regularly but default to easily accessible options.
2. Coffee enthusiasts who value local, authentic experiences but are unaware of all local offerings.

Mediums

Packaging | Video | Socials | OOH | Pop-Ups

Market Evidence

This campaign must be grounded in evidence.

Creative ideas are only as strong as the evidence behind them.

Grounding them in research reveals how people actually buy and experience coffee in Traverse City - not how we *think* they do.

By analyzing the Traverse City coffee category, the patterns in availability, distinctiveness, and consumer behavior can be uncovered and transformed into creative opportunities.

Let's define the category.



Local coffee is less available and more craft.
This limits the number of buyers and market penetration.

Physical Availability

If you want to grow, you must be easy to buy.

Physical availability goes beyond store locations - it reflects how a brand exists in people's everyday paths of life.

The number of buying points, operating hours, distribution reach , and ease of access all contribute to a brand's physical availability.

Let's look at the category from a bird's-eye view.

* Accessibility describes parking, location ease, and path of life.

* Visibility measures signage, foot traffic, and brand salience

Brand	# of Locations	Retail?	Drive-Thru	Accessibility (1-10)	Visibility (1-10)	Avg. Hours
Starbucks	5	Yes	3	8	9	5AM-9PM
Biggby	4	No	3	8	7	6AM-8PM
7 Brew	2	No	2	5	7	5AM-10PM
Mundos	3	Online	No	6	5	8AM-4PM
Cuppa Joe	3	No	1	7	4	7AM-3PM
Higher Grounds	1	Local Online	No	2	4	8AM-3PM
Espresso Bay	1	Online	No	4	4	7AM-7PM
Outpost	1	No	No	4	2	8AM-7PM
Seismoto	1	No	No	3	1	7AM-3PM

Weight

30%

20%

20%

15%

10%

5%

Here are the weighted and normalized physical availability scores:

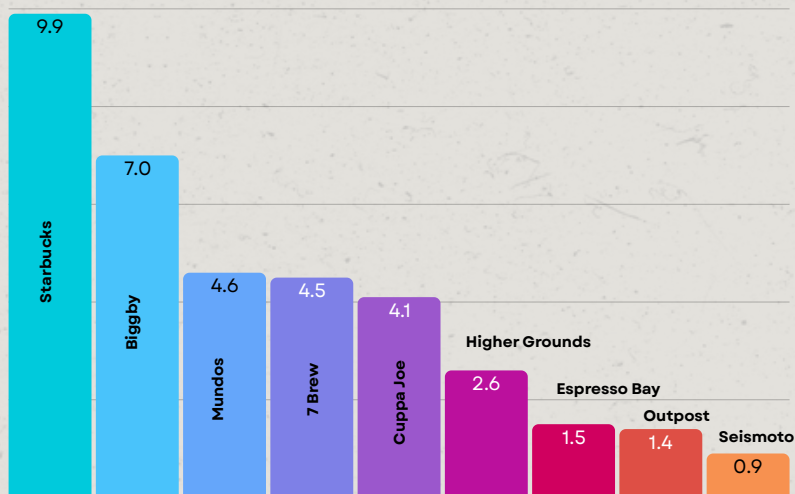
Starbucks	Biggby	Mundos	7 Brew	Cuppa Joe	Higher Grounds	Espresso Bay	Outpost	Seismoto
9.9	7	4.6	4.5	4.1	2.6	1.5	1.4	0.9

Visualizing Availability

Now that we have data, what does it mean?

The charts below show each brand's total availability score and their share of all physical locations in the Traverse City market.

Physical Availability Scores



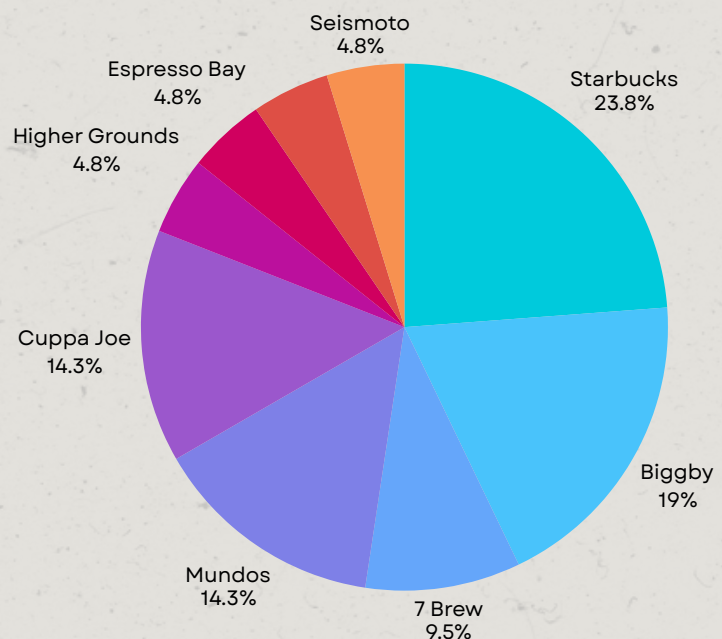
National chains dominate physical availability.

Their scale, hours, and convenience make them easy to buy.

3 national chains account for over half of the total coffee shops in the area.

Local brands face a big gap in reach.

Share of Total Physical Locations



Being easy to buy is half of the challenge.
A brand must also be easy to think of...

Mental Availability

If you want to be chosen, you must first be remembered.

Mental availability measures how easily a brand comes to mind in buying situations. It’s built through fame, familiarity, and distinctive cues that help buyers recognize brands.

Let’s uncover how mentally available our brands are.

* 12 Months

Brand	Google Search Interest	Facebook Followers	Engagement Rate	Google Maps Reviews	Reconizability (1-10)	Age (Market)
Starbucks	100	34M	0.007%	1,258	10	6
Biggby	48	203K	0.07%	1,052	7	8
Espresso Bay	15	6.3K	0.17%	707	4	22
Mundos	16	2.5K	0.60%	830	4	8
7 Brew	25	667K	0.29%	385	7	2
Higher Grounds	14	9.3K	0.16%	238	5	24
Cuppa Joe	2	3.3K	0.15%	685	1	26
Seismoto	15	392	2.81%	65	1	1
Outpost	18	248	1.21%	194	1	2

Weight 30% 10% 10% 15% 30% 5%

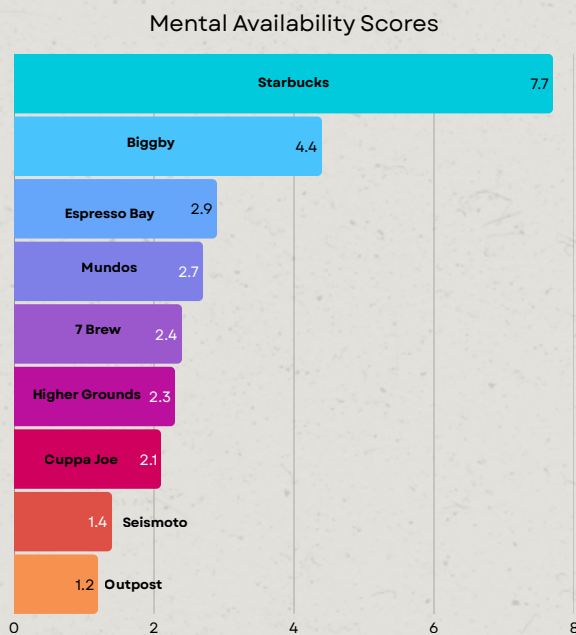
Here are the weighted and normalized mental availability scores:

Starbucks	Biggby	Espresso Bay	Mundos	7 Brew	Higher Grounds	Cuppa Joe	Seismoto	Outpost
7.7	4.4	2.9	2.7	2.4	2.3	2.1	1.4	1.2

Mental Measurements

We've measured how mentally available each brand is.
What stands out?

The charts below show each brand's total mental availability scores and their relative search interest in the Traverse City market.



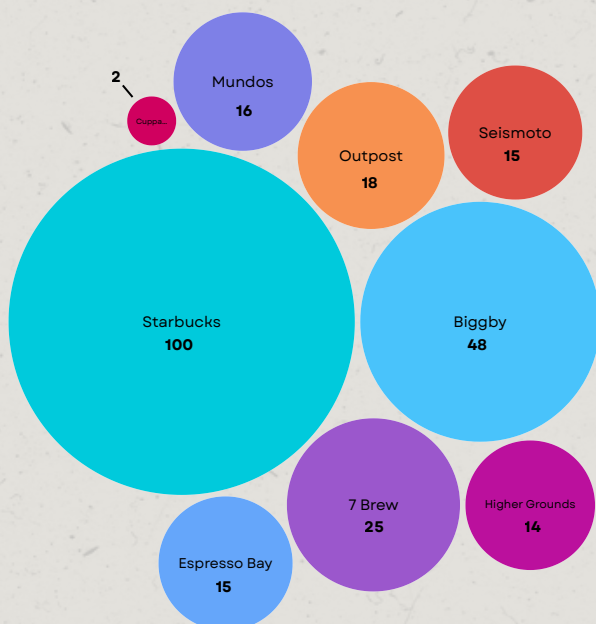
Just like physical availability, national brands dominate mental availability.

Their fame, voice, and consistency make them easy to think of.

Google Search Interest measures relative search volume and serves as a proxy for how top-of-mind a brand is.

Search behavior reveals that national brands are consumers' first thought in the category.

12 Month Google Search Interest
Traverse City/Cadillac Area - Relative to Starbucks (100)



Being easy to think of is the other half.
Mental and physical availability work together to drive growth.

Availability Mapping

No local brand in the Traverse City coffee category is more famous than its footprint.

Big brands win twice - they're easy to find and easy to remember.
Local coffee names stay small in both mind and market.

That leaves room for a local name to punch above its size and be known by more people than it serves.



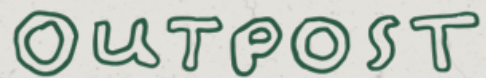
Availability gets you in the game.
Distinctiveness helps you get remembered once you're there.

Distinctiveness

Two brands can sell the same coffee.
Only one will be remembered.

Distinctive assets are the cues that trigger memories – colors, shapes, jingles, fonts, phrases, characters, and symbols that say “that’s us” before a word is spoken.

Memories drive choice.



When evaluating local brands, we notice a sense of sameness.
No brand features faces, phrases, characters, or sounds.

Without these, each brand’s colors, logos, fonts, and shapes must do the heavy lifting.

Higher Grounds and Espresso Bay stand out most with logos
and color systems that are easier to spot and remember.

Now that the evidence is in, let’s see what we’ve uncovered...

Evidence → Ideas

When we pool the results, 3 meaningful conclusions emerge...

National chains dominate convenience. Local brands face a shortage of presence, consistency, and distribution.

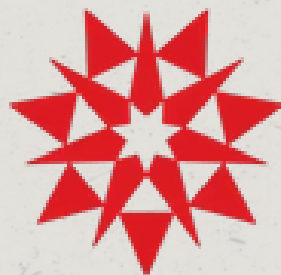
The biggest players are the most famous. Local brands are not top-of-mind, are rarely searched for, and lack reach.

Local brands look and sound similar. Only a few have recognizable assets, and none are building multi-sensory cues.

This leads us to a clear strategic opportunity:

A local brand can punch above its weight by establishing a clear, consistent, and broad share of voice built on strong distinctive cues. By becoming easy to think of and remember, it earns the right to focus on expansion through new buying points.

Let's turn this opportunity into creative ideas that build and drive growth.



HIGHER GROUNDS

The following creative campaign will focus on making Higher Grounds the most memorable coffee brand in Traverse City.

The Big Idea

A rallying cry that turns Higher Grounds' name into a promise.

A phrase that plays on the brand name and everyday ritual of enjoying coffee.

ELEVATE
YOUR CUP

Better coffee, better moments, better days.

The “Elevate Your Cup” campaign connects the brand to a single, repeatable behavior: choosing Higher Grounds as the elevated option.

This line becomes the spine of the campaign. Paired with Higher Grounds Red and the Higher Grounds mark, it forms a distinctive asset bundle that makes the brand easy to spot and even easier to remember.

With consistent, long-term use and investment, the phrase could mature into a brand-level mnemonic that supports the core name.

Packaging

**Make Higher Grounds instantly recognizable in the wild.
Every cup becomes a walking billboard.**

Own Higher Grounds red as the hero cue. In a sea of white and brown cups, HG Red becomes a memory trigger you can't miss. Pair it consistently with the Higher Grounds mark on cups, sleeves, signage, merchandise, and at retail. The color and mark combination becomes the signature visual shorthand for the brand.

**Over time, locals and tourists will spot Higher Grounds from
30 feet away, even when the logo isn't prominent.**



Video

Taking Higher Grounds to higher grounds.

This concept video is the backbone and the spark of the entire campaign. It introduces a simple, distinctive idea that unifies the refreshed packaging, the elevated product story, and the brand's bold new use of Higher Grounds Red.

By placing the brand in recognizable, high-altitude local landmarks, the video builds memory structures tied to real Traverse City cues - making Higher Grounds easier to think of and easier to spot.

With steady, consistent reach, this video can keep Higher Grounds top-of-mind for locals and visitors alike.

WATCH 

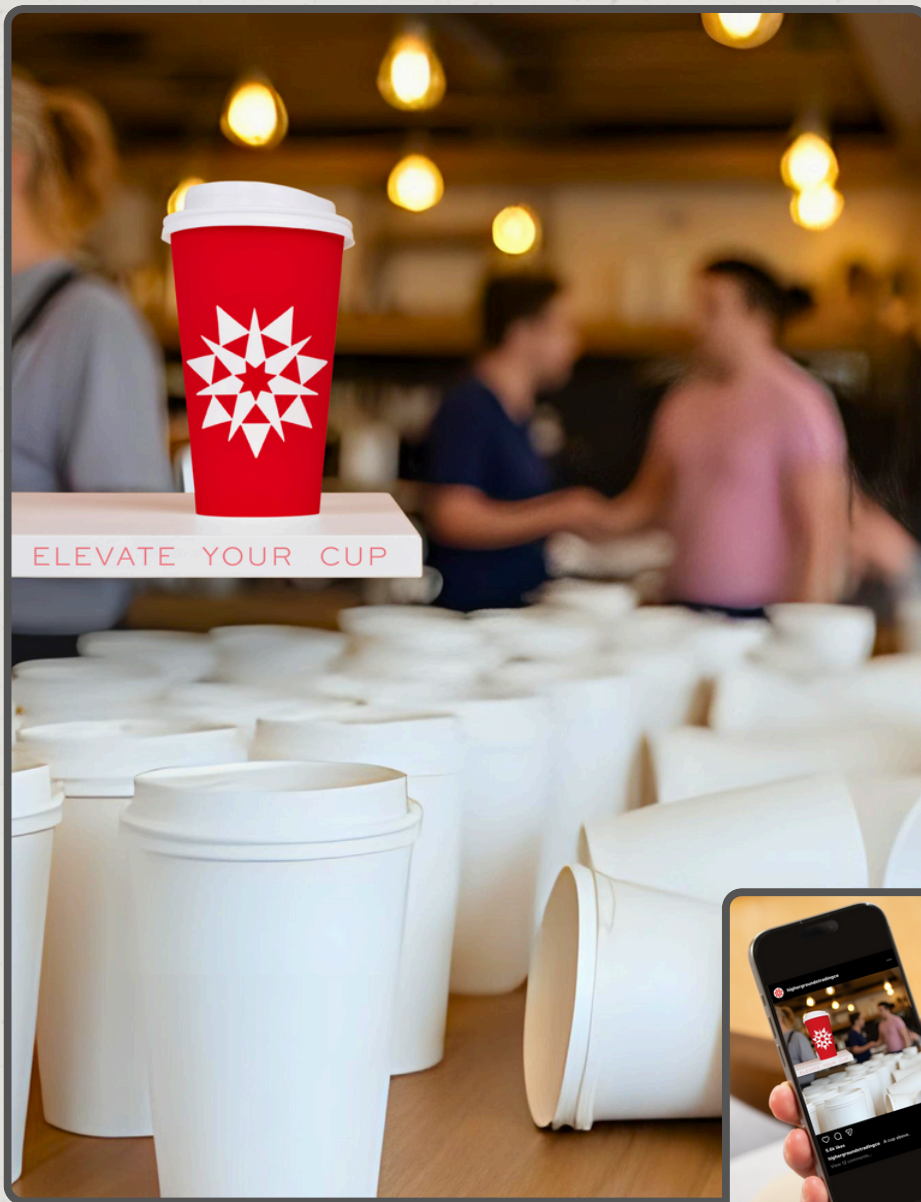


Social

Showcase Higher Grounds as the elevated choice.

In a category full of clones, Higher Grounds can literally stand above the rest. By reinforcing the idea that choosing Higher Grounds is an intentional step up, it creates an instant mental shortcut: Higher Grounds = the elevated option.

The contrast, the height, and the red cue combine into a simple, scroll-stopping memory trigger.



OOH

Take Higher Grounds' name literally.

Stemming from the video concept, this activation places the brand on *actual* higher grounds around the Traverse City area - where locals and tourists gather, snap photos, and share the view.

Bright red signage and simple, location-specific lines turn these local lookouts into native billboards.



Pop - Ups

Taking Higher Grounds to the people.

Higher Grounds *needs* to expand its physical presence beyond its single, hard-to-reach store. Rolling coffee carts at high-traffic, high-visibility locations - like Pyramid Point, Hickory Hills, the farmers market, or office buildings - bring the brand, and the campaign, to life in unexpected ways.

Over time, regular appearances at events and iconic local spots help Higher Grounds punch above its physical footprint and become a familiar, unforgettable part of Traverse City life.



Bringing It Home

Every element of this campaign works together to reinforce the same idea: *Higher Grounds is the elevated choice.*

From the “Elevate Your Cup” video and social content to bright red cups, pop-up carts, and local events, every element of the campaign makes the brand instantly recognizable and memorable.

Here are some highlights we noticed:

National chains dominate scale and fame, but local brands can win through smart, consistent use of distinctive assets.

Higher Grounds can become memorable and familiar by owning the color red in the Traverse City market.

Rolling carts, pop-ups, and events let Higher Grounds reach more people without needing dozens of stores.

With focused effort and consistency, Higher Grounds can become the coffee people notice, seek out, and remember - turning a small local brand into a familiar part of Traverse City’s coffee scene.

ELEVATE
YOUR CUP