

Example: National Retail Bookstore Chain

Observations

Start by noticing behavior changes (not opinions or attitudes). The actual actions people are taking that look different.

Look beyond your own organization to adjacent industries, demographics, and cultural spaces. The key is to observe without immediately jumping to conclusions about why.

Response

- **Amazon sales growing rapidly** - customers buying books online.
 - **Starbucks exploding everywhere** - opening 5+ stores per day, positioning as "third place" community gathering spots (not just coffee).
 - **Destinations & Experiences**- B/N adding large cafes (started 1997), comfortable seating, people spending hours browsing and hanging out. Borders adding music listening stations, reading areas, becoming hangout spaces not just retail.
 - **Millennials absent from our stores** - 20-somethings not shopping with us like their parents did.
 - **Competitors opening in urban/walkable areas** - Starbucks and Barnes & Noble choosing downtown districts, near universities, high foot-traffic locations.
 - **Our stores in suburban strip malls** - located where our current (aging) customer base lives, not where young people are living/gathering.
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Moments

Identify specific events or crises creating urgency right now.

These are reactive behavioral spikes triggered by things like economic shifts, natural disasters, policy changes, or cultural flashpoints.

Response

- **"Bowling Alone" becomes cultural phenomenon** - Book documents Americans' increasing isolation, loneliness, and disconnection from community. Widespread awareness that social capital is collapsing. "Third places" seen as solution.
- **Amazon Prime** - Free 2-day shipping is making online shopping dramatically more convenient than driving to stores.
- **Housing market weakening** - Economic uncertainty beginning, consumer spending becoming more cautious
- **iPhone announcement** - Signals the mobile/digital future is accelerating faster than expected, physical media looking increasingly obsolete

Intersections

Look for patterns where multiple unrelated trends point in the same direction.

When you see the same signal showing up across technology, economics, demographics, and culture simultaneously, you're likely seeing a real movement. This is where you ask: Are any moments amplifying nascent movements?

Response

- **Third place movement (observed) + Bowling Alone crisis (moment) =** Physical retail must be experiential
- **Amazon growth (observed) + Prime launch (moment) =** Products moving online permanently
- **Young people in cities (observed) + Mobile future (moment) =** Our locations are wrong

Pattern: Transactional product retail in suburban strip malls seems bleak.

Insights

Synthesize what all these patterns collectively reveal about what people actually want.

What are new behaviors revealing about unmet needs and desires? What is driving these changes? What do people value now that they didn't value before (or vice versa)?

Response

- **Belonging over transactions** - They'll pay for spaces where community happens (third places), not just product shelves.
- **Convenience as default** - If it's just products, they want it delivered to their door, not a trip to a strip mall.
- **To live in walkable, urban places** - Younger generation rejecting suburban sprawl lifestyle their parents chose.
- **Authentic community** - Not commercialized retail, but real connection around shared ideals/values.

Core insight: People don't want to shop for just products. They want to belong to communities that reflect who they are.

Pause or Go

Synthesize what all these patterns collectively reveal about what people actually want.

What are new behaviors revealing about unmet needs and desires? What is driving these changes? What do people value now that they didn't value before (or vice versa)?

Response

- If this insight is true, then our entire 170-store model is in trouble.
- My instinct is to add coffee shops and remodel. But does that optimize a broken model?
- If the movements continue, then we probably have 5-10 years to act before a real crisis.
- We should **not pause**, we should start plotting some options.

Impact

Every organization is built on assumptions about what people want, how they behave, and what they value.

Honestly assess which of your organization's core assumptions are breaking down. If the trends you've identified continue for 5-10 years, which of your assumptions become obsolete?

Response

- **Assumption: Shopping in physical stores is what people do**
Breaking: Amazon/online making this obsolete.
- **Assumption: Suburban strip mall locations serve customers well**
Breaking: Young people are moving to cities, not suburbs where our stores are located.
- **Assumption: Physical retail is for browsing and buying products**
Breaking: Third place movement shows physical spaces must offer experience/community, not just products.
- **Assumption: Current customer base will sustain us**
Breaking: Customer base aging with no young pipeline to replace them

Assets

Identify what you have that becomes more valuable given these cultural shifts.

Not everything is broken. Some of your existing strengths (relationships, expertise, brand trust, physical spaces) may be exactly what people need in the new landscape.

Response

- **Relationships with 40,000+ nonprofits**
Valuable for digital platform/partnership model.
- **Content creation expertise**
Valuable as digital/streaming becomes primary distribution.
- **Brand trust in nonprofit community**
Valuable as quality/authenticity filter
- **Publishing capabilities**
Valuable for creating content distributed everywhere (not just our stores).
- **Physical real estate (some locations)**
Could be valuable if strategically relocated to urban areas and transformed to third places.
- **No debt and big donors**
Enables capital for transformation investment.

Opportunity

Design your response using your assets to serve what people actually want in the shifting landscape.

What could we become over 3-10 years to stay relevant and effective? Use the assets you identified to build a set of realistic options.

The best opportunities align what you're uniquely positioned to do with what people increasingly need.

Response

Option A: Transform to Third Place + Digital Hybrid

- Close suburban stores over 10 years as leases expire
- Open 15-20 flagship locations in urban/walkable areas
 - Redesign as community spaces that serve the area: cafes, small group meeting rooms, event spaces, Launch digital platform for educational content subscriptions

Option B: Publishing Powerhouse

- Announce 10-year retail wind-down
- Invest retail proceeds into digital publishing infrastructure
- Partner with every platform for distribution.
 - Sell through EVERY channel - not just our stores
- License content broadly rather than control distribution

Option C: Nonprofit Content Producer

- Pivot from selling products to providing agency-like services
- Build platform for nonprofits creating own content
- Leverage relationships (our key asset) in new way
- Minimal physical retail, mostly digital/service model