

Honors Thesis
December 14th, 2020
Emma Collert

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Executive Summary

The Curbside Chronicle is a street paper based out of Oklahoma City. They exist as a nonprofit whose primary goal is to offer flexible employment to individuals experiencing homelessness who may otherwise be unable to earn an income. The magazines--produced inhouse by a small team of full time staff as well as freelancers—is sold at a cost of \$0.75 to trained salespeople. Initial training goes over safety tips, expectations will working as a member of Curbside Chronicle's many salespeople, the obtaining of a dark green vest, which serves both as a way to hold magazines and as distinct marker of the brand. Because many individuals experiencing homelessness may not have government issued ID, The Curbside Chronicle requires minimal to no documentation to begin as a salesperson. The primary consequence for problematic behavior is a halt in sales of magazines to that person—resulting in a loss of what is for many, their primary ability to earn money.

The Curbside Chronicle was developed as a way to shift the conversation around the homeless population in Oklahoma City after one of the co-founders attended college in Nashville—where there is a noticeably different attitude. Nashville's street paper, the Contributor, seemed to have something to do with this. The goal was to increase interaction between housed and unhoused people—and they did this using magazine sales. Rather than passing these people by, they were able to help in a concrete way that felt productive and safe. It also meant that, for some for the first time in years, they were having conversations with individuals who were looking at them in the eye as a person capable of contributing. Now, in OKC, the Curbside Chronicle helps provide the same dignity to people experiencing homelessness by offering a way to improve their situation, receive access to case worker services, and begin saving. By participating in the vendor program, people have re-entered housing, improved their state of life, and found more full-time employment.

One of the difficulties that the Curbside Chronicle faces is an accurate count of sales per month. Because they are not the direct distributor (so as to say, they do not sell to the public) their counts rely on what is reported back by vendors. These log sheets are often impacted by the outdoor conditions, lost, or just unreliable in general due to the state of mind of the respondent.

Research Problem:

What are the general attitudes and emotions surrounding Curbside Chronicle? What are some standard behaviors of Curbside Chronicle readers?

Unfamiliar Terms:

CC – Curbside Chronicle

THA – The Homeless Alliance

Why is this Information Beneficial?

As a nonprofit seeking to improve relationships and attitudes surrounding the population of individuals experiencing homelessness, it's important to ensure that the goals and intent of the organization is appropriately reaching the intended target: the reader. Additionally, the Curbside Chronicle sought out a consumer behavior report on their readers in order to leverage for additional advertising revenue, a key supporting part of the success of their agency model. Through my survey, I was able to identify the general sentiment regarding current recommended sale price for the magazines, common purchasing habits, predicted life experiences over the next year, and general demographic information. In order to provide accurate results, the wording of the survey questions is vital for the Curbside Chronicle. It is also important to ensure multiple ways to access the survey, including a QR code, a link, and a mailed in version. Considering the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shut down within the month of March, when our survey was live, this was particularly helpful. However, it complicated further the ability to track sales of magazines. Upon the last day of the survey, I began with entering mailed information into the system as well as sectioning relevant material in order to best present it to Curbside Chronicle.

Method

Descriptive Research/Census Sampling

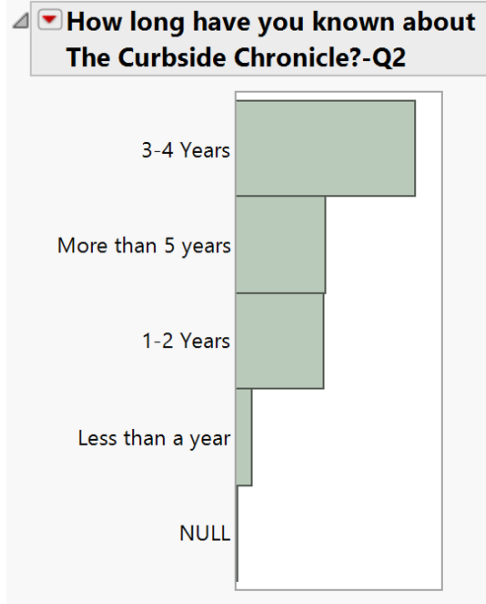
In order to collect the necessary data, I conducted descriptive research in the form of a forty-one question survey for our sampling frame (the readers of the Curbside Chronicle magazine). This survey allowed for us to understand choices being made around the Curbside Chronicle relevant to their perception of the brand as well as awareness of the brand, and behavior not relevant to Curbside Chronicle including relevant media consumption, future purchases, etc. We also included a general demographic section, as per the admittance of Curbside Chronicle, it is difficult to collect information on who makes up their user base. Our survey population is difficult to pinpoint, as our distributions were made through magazines—a format in which purchases vary month by month due to weather, content, holidays, and other factors. Modest estimates for the month of march, when this survey was conducted, range between six & eight thousand. With a total record count of 353, this puts our response rate in the 4% range, assuming our highest estimate of 8,000 magazines were distributed and received by individuals. This record total does not include incomplete surveys or test surveys, which were removed prior to analysis.

These questions were broken into four key categories: 1) Brand awareness & sentiment, 2) Consumer Behavior, and 3) Demographics. Each section seeks to fulfill an expectation of the client as to the purpose of the research.

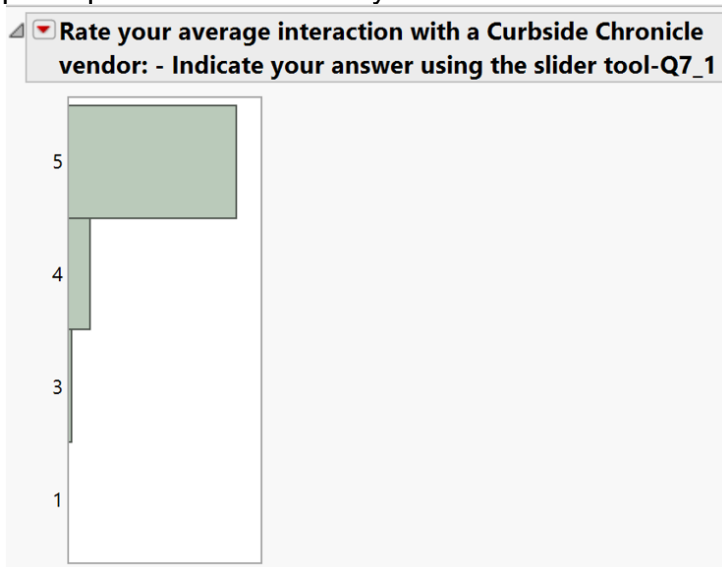
As Curbside Chronicle's highest value laid within understanding the makeup of their consumers, I have used the following frequency graphs to portray the breakdown of the responses across respondents. I have also included some sentiment analysis for those short answer questions in order to display a quick understanding of the relevant answers.

Results

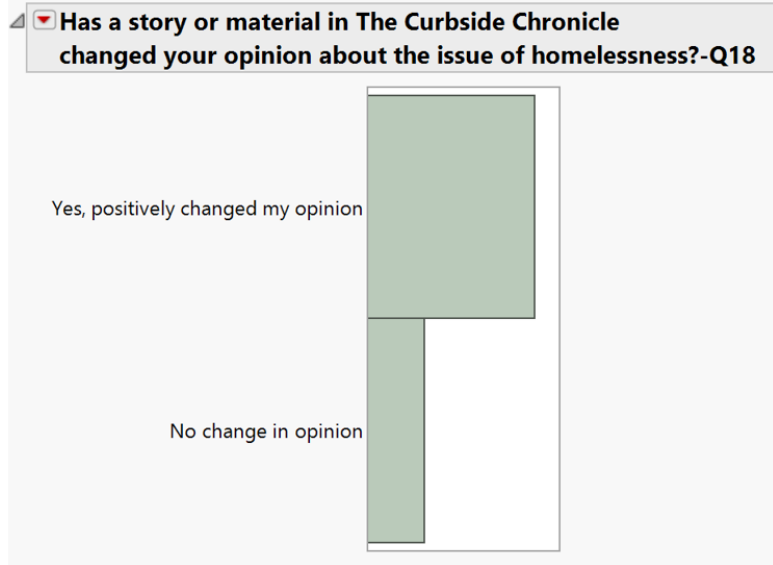
Brand Awareness & Sentiment: Understanding the level of understanding for the processes and purposes of the Curbside Chronicle, as well as the general sentiment towards the organization.



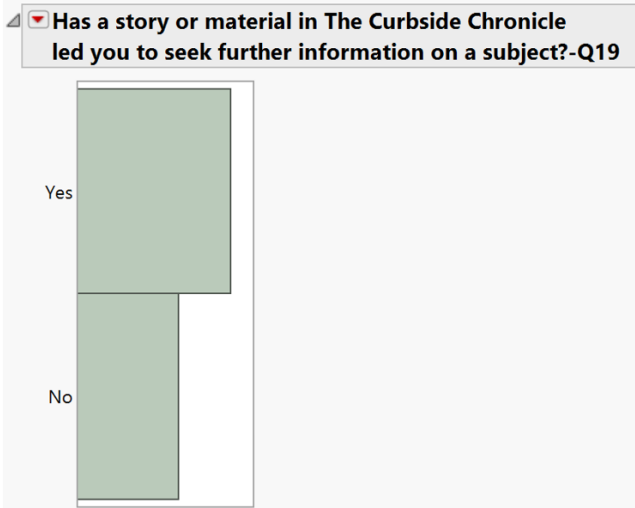
This question sought to determine an outline on length of brand awareness. As we can see, the answers here show a skew towards a higher number of years. I believe this skew is most likely a representation of the likelihood for more loyal consumers to participate in reader surveys.



Here we are able to see a quick view into an average interaction with vendors. As one of the most important aspects of the Curbside Chronicle's goals, increasing positive interactions with those experiencing homelessness is something they are constantly monitoring. The overwhelming majority lie within the upper ranges of 4+5, but the lower

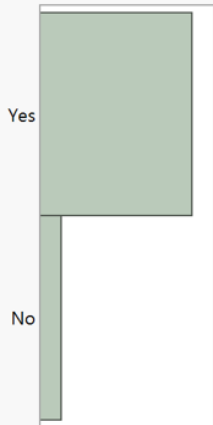


One key takeaway here is the important mention that, while an option was presented for a negative change in opinion, no respondents chose it.



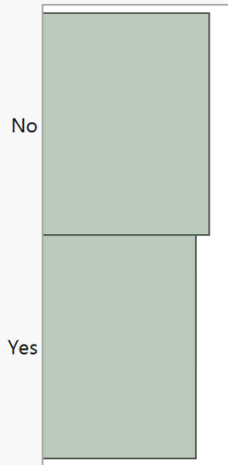
While this is much more evenly distributed compared to question 18, it is still valuable to consider that 201 respondents said they had done more research on a topic mentioned within Curbside Chronicle. This means that one of the secondary tenants of the Curbside Chronicle is succeeding—to educate on the realities of homelessness.

Did you know that The Curbside Chronicle is a nonprofit that relies on donations to provide case management and supportive services to vendors?-Q21



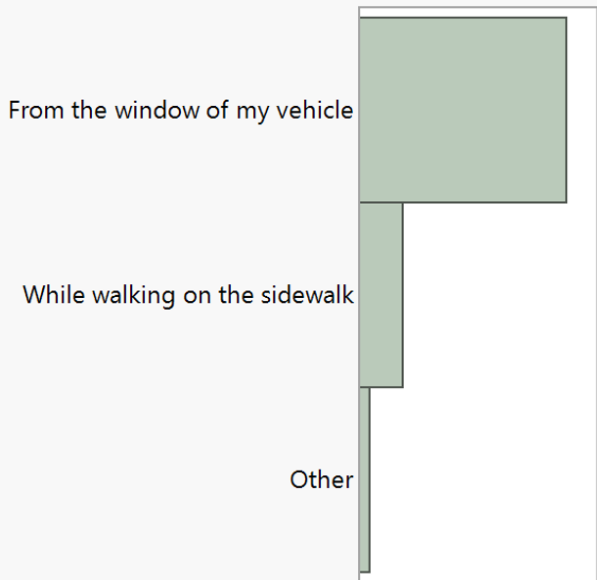
This actually was a surprise for both me and the Curbside Chronicle team. While efforts are always made to educate readers on the purpose of the paper, this represents that many of the readers are fairly aware of the services provided besides the opportunity to make sales. It is worth mentioning, however, that this question may be skewed for two reasons. 1) the phrasing of the question may lead to more people saying yes, and 2) more loyal readers may be more likely to have done research on the Curbside Chronicle.

Were you aware that Curbside is planning to open a year-round flower shop this spring?-Q23



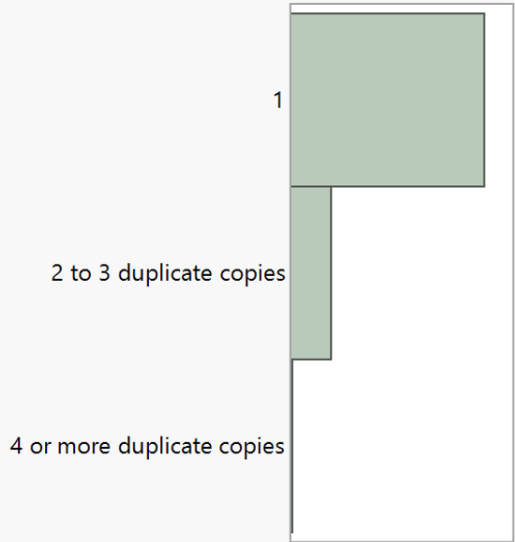
The distribution here is to be somewhat expected. While the flower shop has been actively advertised, it previously was only a part of special events such as Valentine's, or mother's day events. This question also served to promote readers to investigate more. Alongside new marketing efforts post survey, these results may very well have changed.

How do you typically purchase the magazine? - Selected Choice-Q4



This distribution actually serves somewhat as a surprise to me—though was one of the original intentions for vendors. As a way to reduce panhandling, vendors are encouraged to sell at the same interactions they once asked for funds. I did expect more individuals to purchase while walking on the sidewalk.

For each new issue of The Curbside Chronicle, how many copies do you typically buy?-Q5

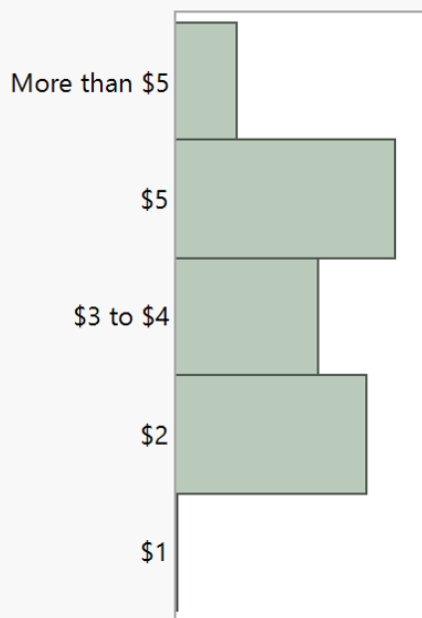


This question was a main point of interest for my contact, Kinsey Crocker. As determining total sales that reach consumers is difficult with an unreliable distribution source, there was some expectation that consumers may be purchasing multiple copies of the magazine. While the majority seem to only purchase one copy, it seems that there is a sufficient subset (roughly 17%) which purchase multiple copies.

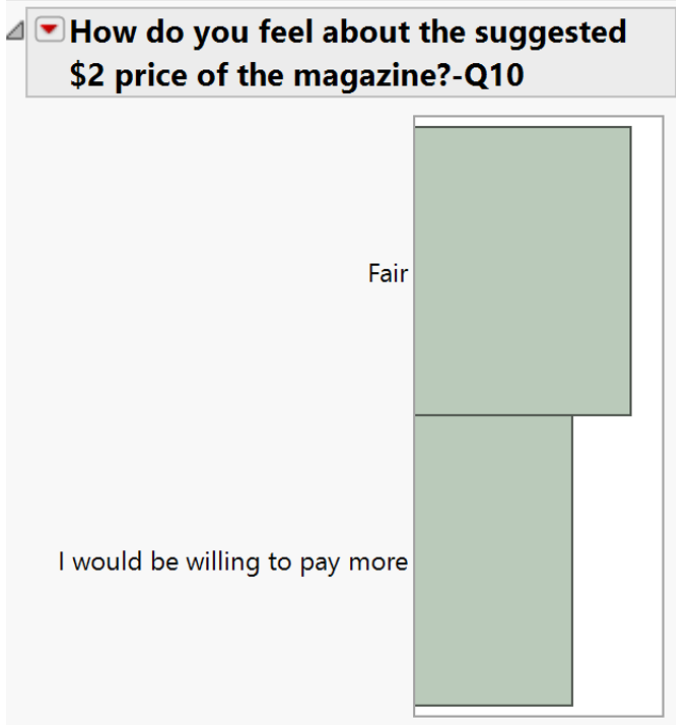


This distribution fits with expectations—with most purchases being happenstance, while 35% seek out either any vendor, or a specific vendor. This may also suggest that individuals are likely to purchase a second or third magazine if they run into a different vendor sometime later in the month—another challenge in determining total purchases.

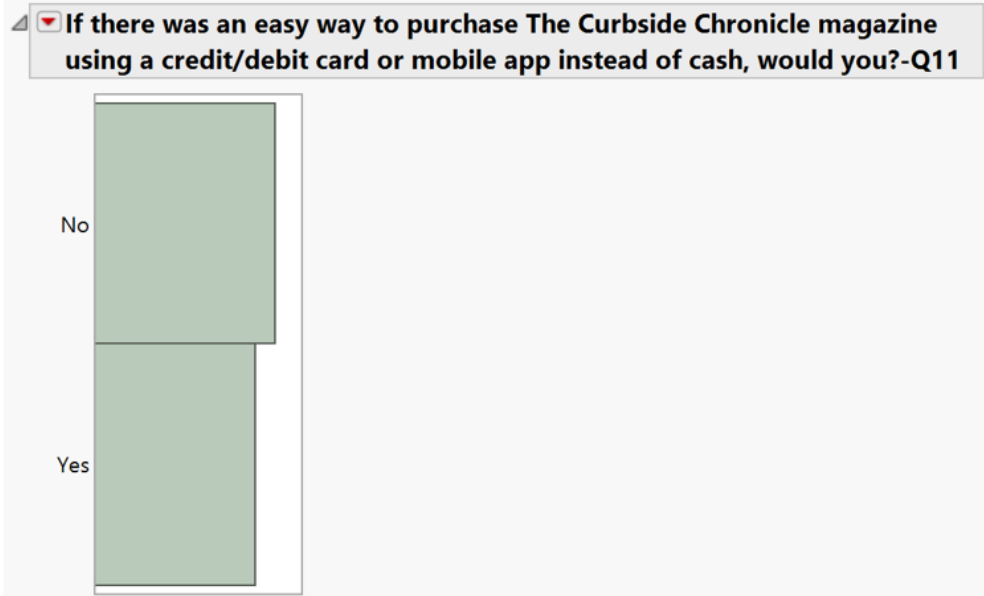
When buying the magazine, how much do you typically pay?-Q9



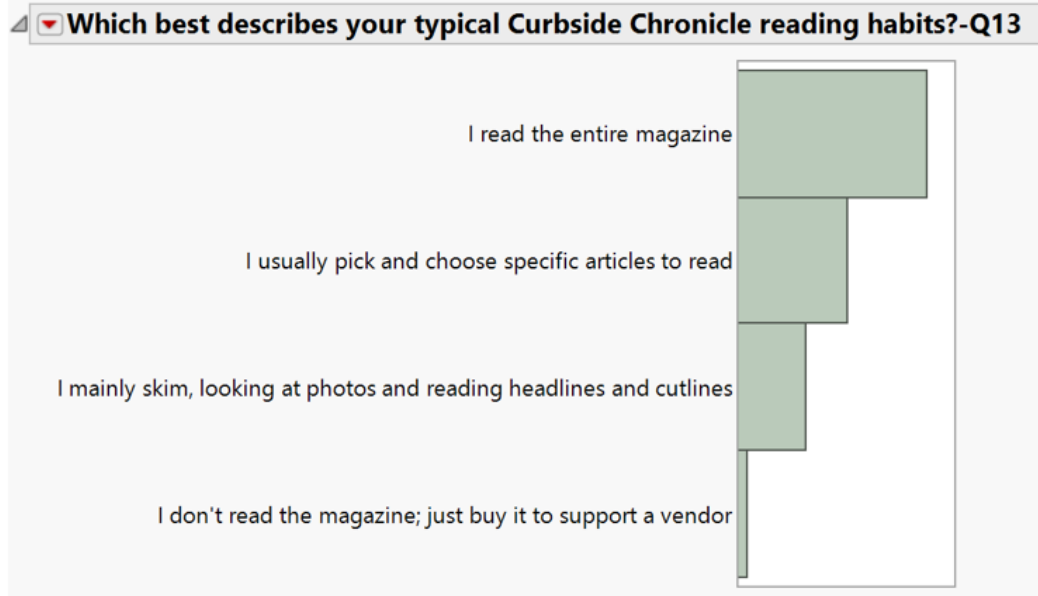
This, in conjunction with question 10, may lead Curbside Chronicle to consider increasing recommended sales prices for papers. While the \$2 request is often exceeded, it does appear that the market would be willing to pay more—as roughly 68% of consumers currently spend over \$2/magazine.



See commentary above.



With a total number of interested respondents being 161, this may be a move for Curbside Chronicle to consider.



Original predictions actually expected those who bought just to support a vendor to be higher. Once again we must assume some skew due to the nature of the respondents, but this does seem to suggest that many do take in the content within the paper—supporting CC's goal to educate.



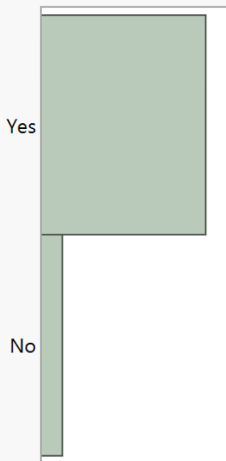
This is another question whose distributions surprised me. I would be interested to follow up in future surveys on just how individuals recycle their papers—be it in public spaces, with friends, or somewhere else.

Question 15: What content do you like best?

vendor local homelessness
written issues social events q&a's
statistics arts entertainment column good
know guides voter family friendly kid oriented international papers
street

We can see a clear skew here towards vendor content—which makes sense. It offers a view into vendors lives that can be difficult to achieve otherwise, and I do believe offers much of the best education on the topic possible by providing a personable and empathetic perspective on how homelessness affects individuals in our community.

Do you ever discuss the material in The Curbside Chronicle with colleagues, family or friends?-Q17



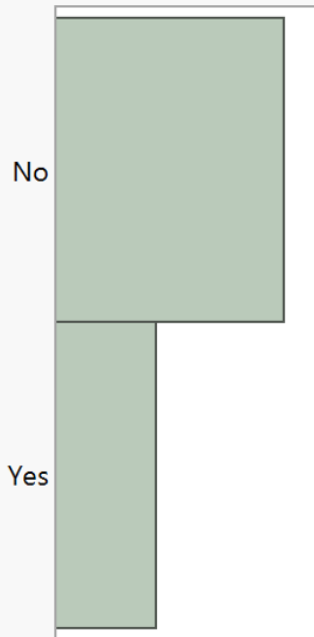
The overwhelming yes here speaks to a success of Curbside. With an ultimate goal of ending homelessness altogether—so much of the work that must be done is shifting public view. With 340 individuals saying they discussed the material elsewhere after reading, this is a significant success.

Question 20: News

npr oklahoman local cnn facebook
podcasts twitter gazette tv post daily journal radio social times media
washington fox instagram online pbs com new york nyt bbc internet magazine msnbc okc oklahoma record
stations street wall

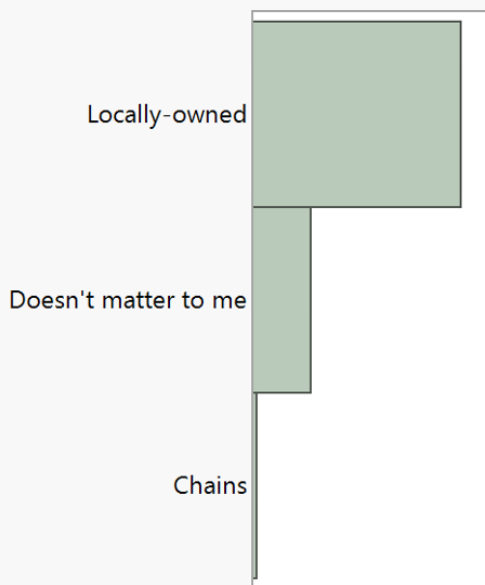
This question serves to show which media sources readers spent the most time with—primarily for advertising purposes.

Have you ever donated to The Curbside Chronicle outside of purchasing the magazine?-Q22



This distribution is actually more surprising in the amount of respondents who answered yes. It is expected that many more individuals who purchase and read the CC never donate directly to the organization. This is once again likely affected by the skew of respondents.

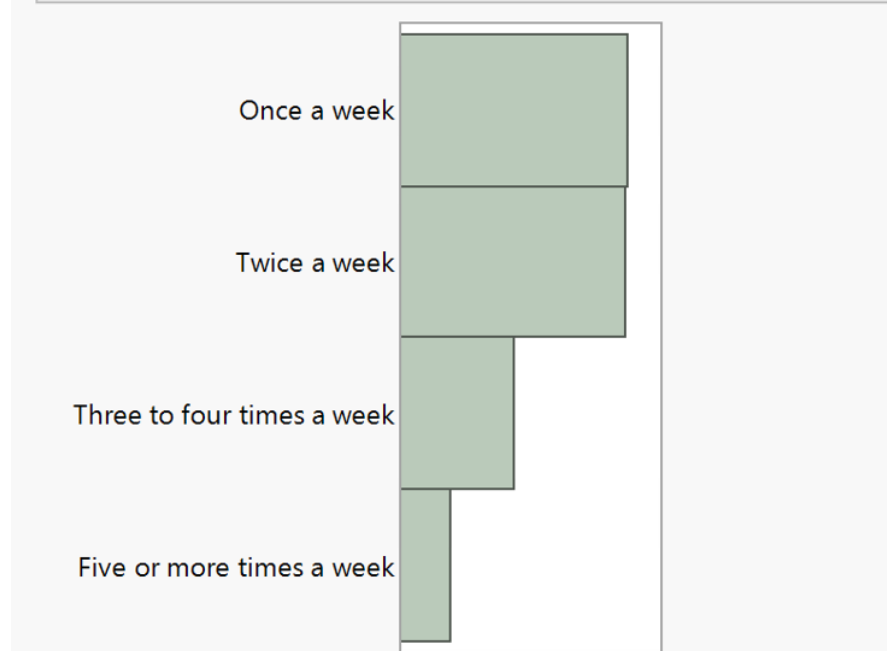
Considering your buying habits, do you prefer locally-owned businesses or national chains?-Q26



This question served to outline consumer behavior for advertising purposes. We can see a clear preference for locally-owned businesses, though this may be a question

impacted by a skew for individuals to answer 'correctly.' Many consider eating local to be the best option—so this may not be completely accurate.

▲ **In a typical week, how often do you dine out?-Q27**



This question serves mainly as information for advertising purposes, with the distribution of answers about where we expected.

Question 28: What things will you do in the next year?

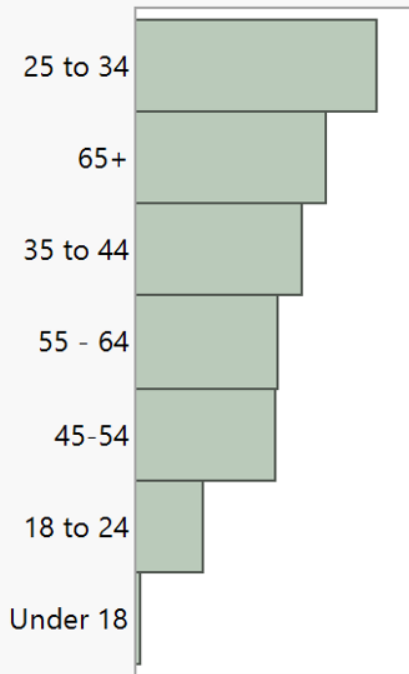
vacation **purchase**

oklahoma state furniture go okc stay stay-cation
financial investment planning services utilize remodel appliances car
home

This question's primary goal was to outline what major purchases may occur in the next year, again for advertising purposes. We can see that vacations, furniture, and remodeling are key opportunities.

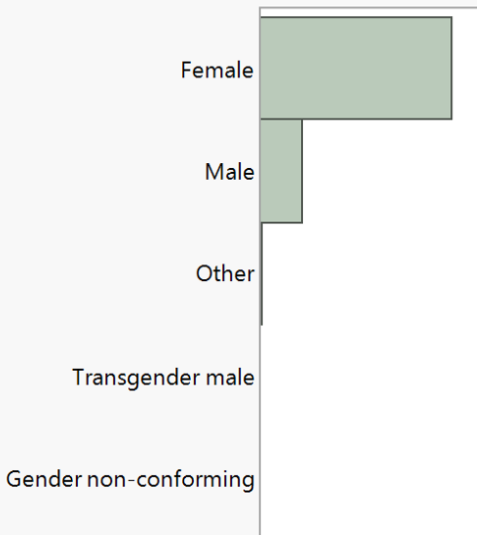
Overall Demographics: Determining who makes up the consumers of the Curbside Chronicle.

What is your age?-Q29

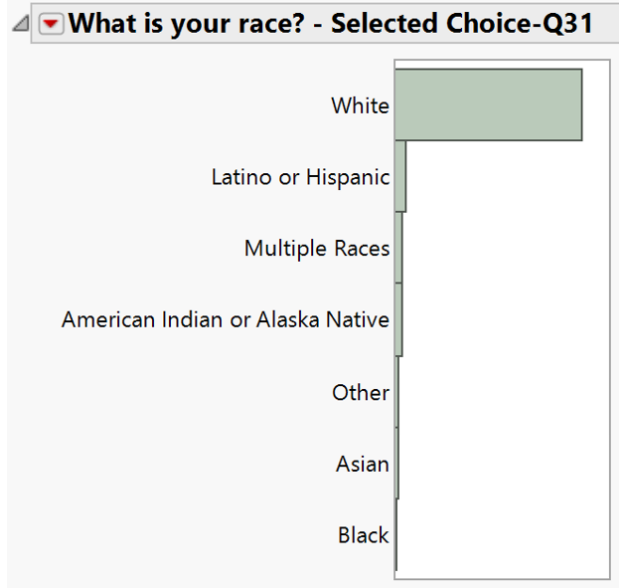


I, personally, am rather surprised by the amount of 65 and above respondents here. While all other distributions seem in line with my general expectations, I was unaware that there was such a strong consumer base in that age group.

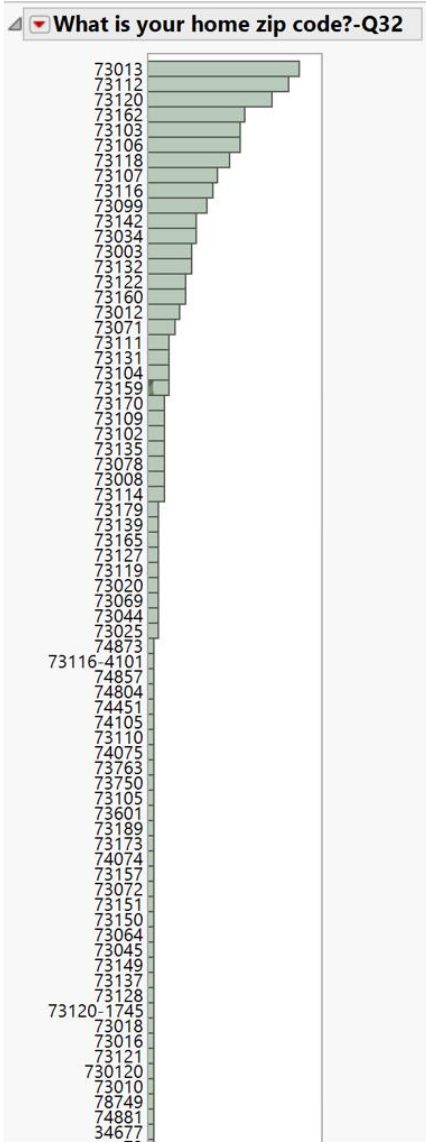
How would you describe your gender identity? - Selected Choice-Q30



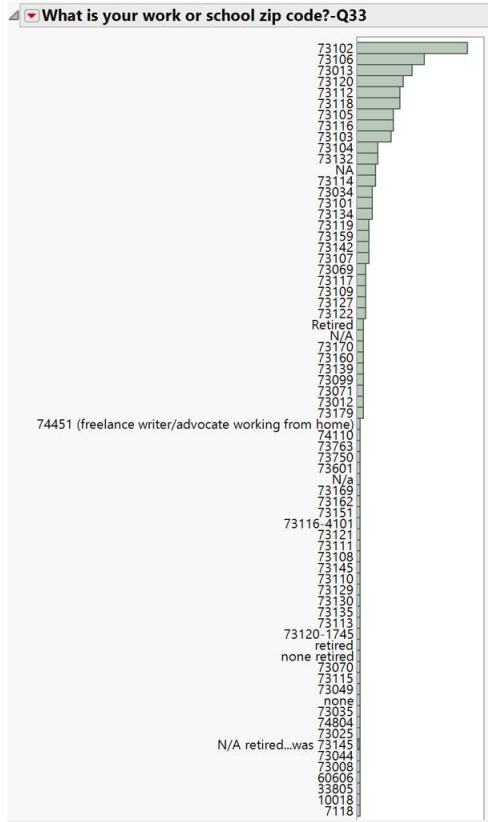
This is in line with our expectations, with a significant skew towards female readers.



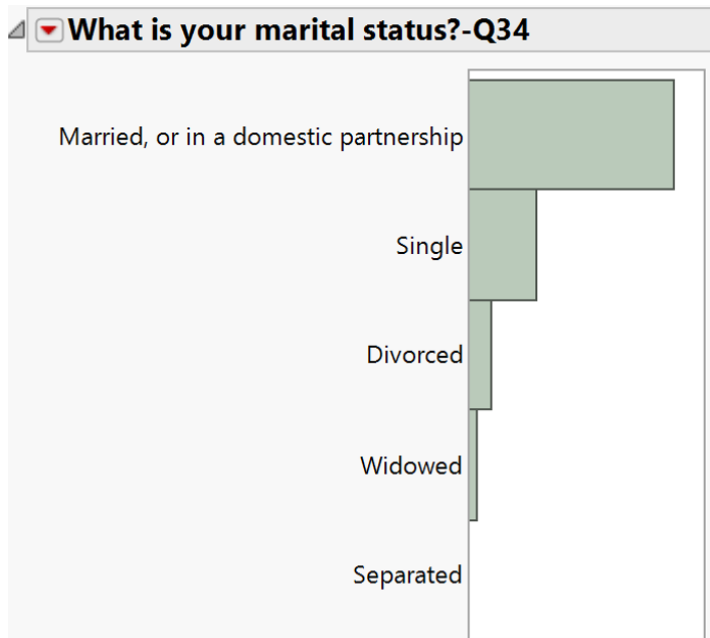
This is also in line with expectations, with a significant skew towards Caucasian readers.



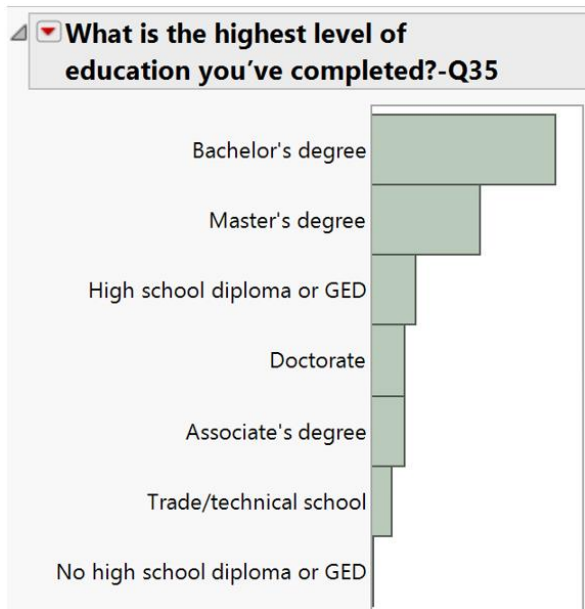
The purpose of this question was to determine where individuals encountered vendors by determining whether their home and work were zip codes within the OKC metro area. We also wanted to determine if we could outline who was likely purchasing due to a work commute vs. travel not associated with work—something seen due to the shift in zip codes between home and work.



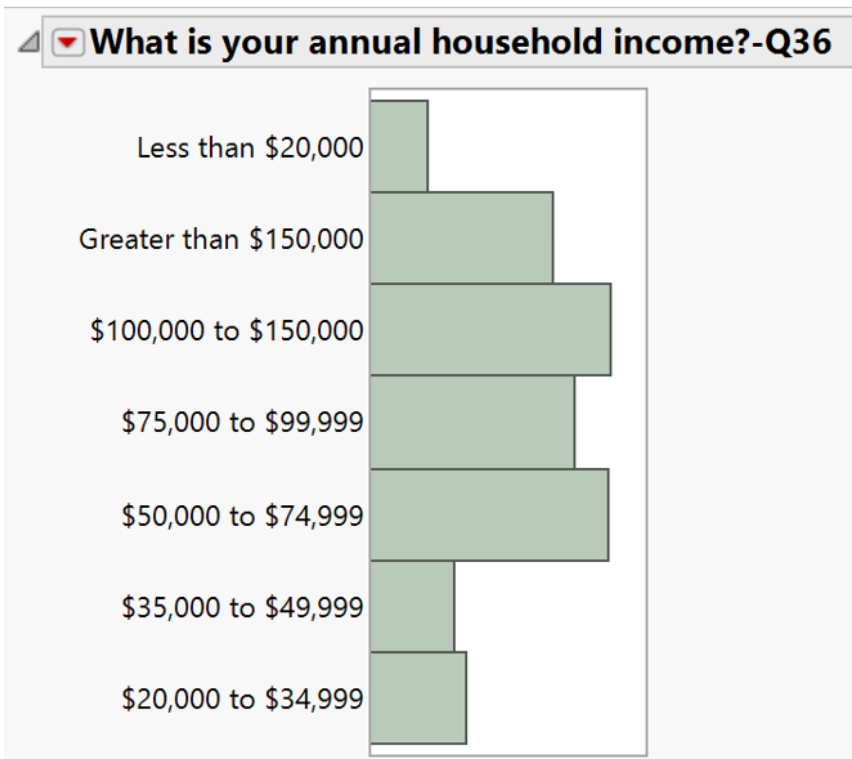
See above.



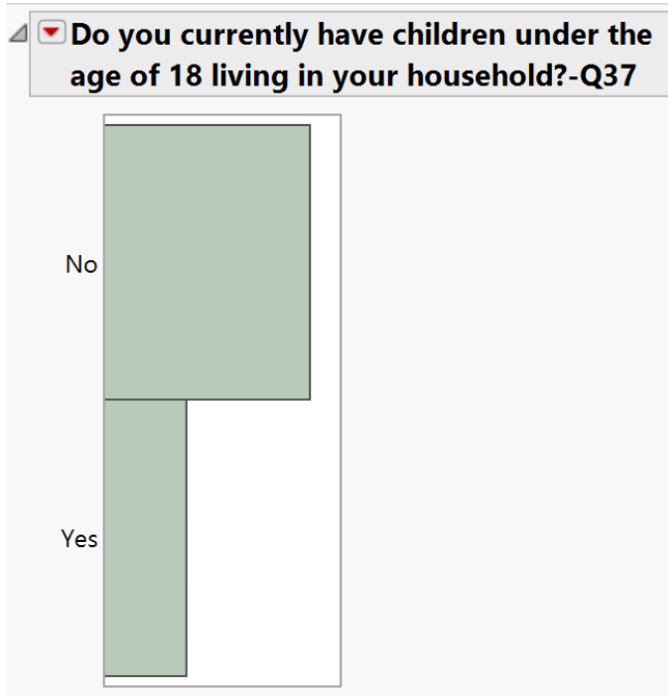
I do not believe that we had initial predictions for this demographic question, although this fits with the age responses we received. It also fits with our income question later on in the survey.



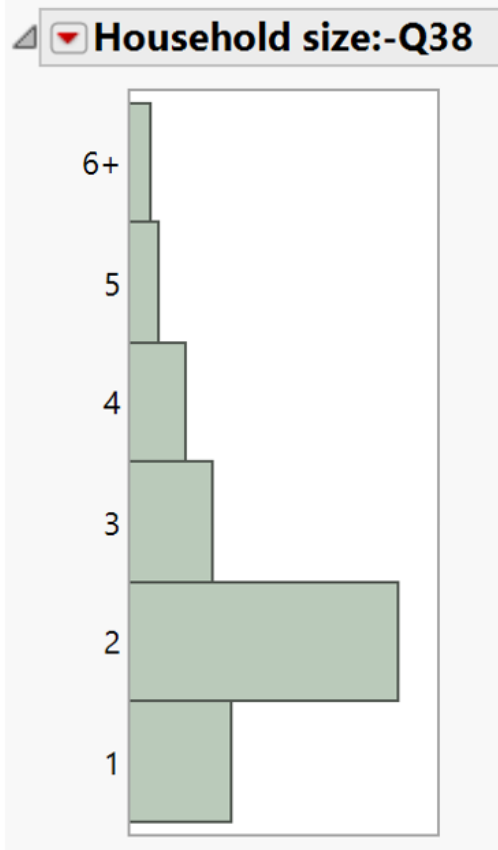
This distribution is in line with our expectations, as there does seem to be a skew towards higher education among consumers of the Curbside Chronicle.



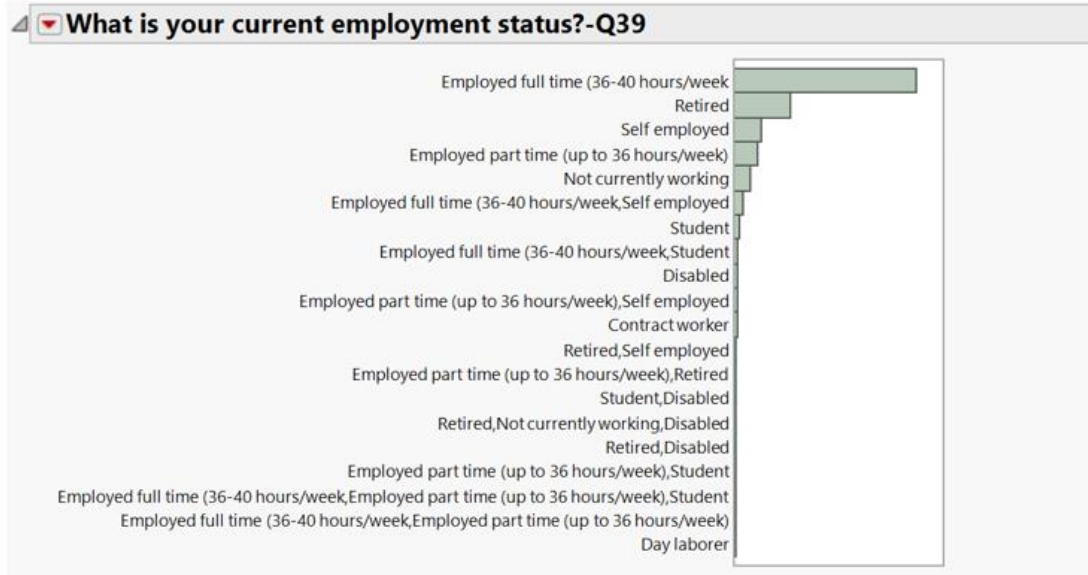
This distribution seems to hold in line with our expectations as well—with a significant amount of respondents being in the middle class to upper middle class range for Oklahoma.



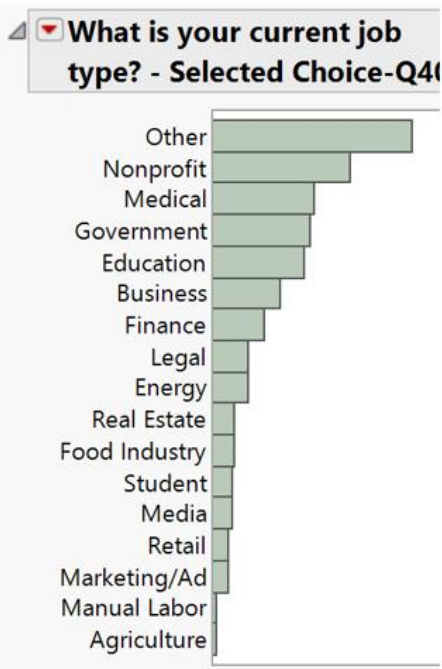
I do not believe we had initial expectations for the distribution from this question, though it seems in line with our age distribution previously seen.



This distribution seems to match with our other questions well, and represent general averages for the Oklahoma City area.



While the amount of retired and self employed is somewhat surprising to me, the distribution is clearly skewed towards fulltime workers—something that fits in with our previous income questions.



I am somewhat surprised at the number of respondents indicated their job type as nonprofit here—although this skew is likely explained once more by the loyal consumer assumption. Beyond that, medical and government are close followers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Curbside Chronicle set out to ascertain a few key things with the use of this survey. They hoped to determine:

1. The Curbside Chronicle purchasing habits of readers
2. The consumer behavior of readers relevant to advertising
3. The general understanding and awareness of the Curbside Chronicle mission with readers
4. The general demographics of their reader base

For 1, it was important to determine not only how readers were purchasing the magazine, but also the average price. While the current recommended price is \$2, it has long been reported by vendors that many individuals tip more as well. My findings suggest that the market would bear an increase in price—though it should also come with a prudent attempt to educate readers on the functions of Curbside relevant to employment, fund accumulation, and costs to develop and sell the papers.

Looking to question 2, we can see a clear preference for locally owned businesses, as well as an indication that many individuals were considering a vacation or remodeling at the time of answering. However, it is worth noting that due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this information may be difficult to rely on.

With question 3, we had some good news. It is apparent that, of those who responded to the survey, many have a good grasp on how and why Curbside Chronicle functions. It also appears that many consumers are also readers—and take in the content of the magazines rather than simply purchase them to help a vendor. As one of the key tenants of the Curbside Chronicle is to provide education on the difficulties of Homelessness, this is great to hear.

Considering question 4, it's important to note some trends that stood out from expectations: namely the large group of 65+, retired individuals reading Curbside. This may be particularly relevant for advertising purposes down the road. This survey also found many more individuals in the middle to upper middle class income range, as well as a significant skew towards female readers.

Assumptions

Overall, I believe this survey has been accurate with a few key caveats. It is important to note that many locations shut down partway through March—when our survey was in distribution. While this could have affected sampling rate, it also could have impacted questions regarding consumer behavior. It is difficult to predict how this event will have impacted the overall results, so additional surveys may be necessary. Additionally, as the respondents for this survey are most likely to be of the most loyal group of consumers, it is safest to assume that both awareness and purchasing frequency trend highly for our respondents.

Appendices

The Curbside Chronicle 2020 Reader Survey

We want to hear from you. Help us provide a better product by sharing your opinions and reading habits. Our magazine exists to provide employment opportunities to people transitioning out of homelessness. It is important to us that we provide a quality product. We want to learn more about our readers so that we can grow and improve. Thank you for being a part of our community.

Surveys are anonymous and you can participate in two ways:

Take this survey online (PREFERRED) by visiting: www.TheCurbsideChronicle.org/survey



Or complete this form and mail to: The Curbside Chronicle 1724 NW 4th St, Oklahoma City, OK 73106

How long have you known about The Curbside Chronicle?

- Less than a year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- More than 5 years

How often do you purchase The Curbside Chronicle magazine?

- This is my first time
- Weekly
- Monthly
- A few times each month
- A few times each year

How do you typically purchase the magazine?

- From the window of my vehicle
- While walking on the sidewalk
- Other _____

For each new issue of The Curbside Chronicle, how many copies do you typically buy?

- 1
- 2-3 duplicate copies
- 4 or more duplicate copies

Which best describes your buying habits?

- I only buy the magazine when I happen to see a vendor.
- I purposely seek out *any* vendor to buy the magazine.
- I purposely seek out a *specific* vendor to buy the magazine.

Rate your average interaction with a Curbside Chronicle vendor:

Negative 1 2 3 4 5 Positive

How could it be improved? _____

When buying the magazine, how much do you typically pay?

- \$1
- \$2
- \$3-4
- \$5
- More than \$5

How do you feel about the suggested \$2 price of the magazine?

- Too expensive
- Fair
- I would be willing to pay more

If there was an easy way to purchase The Curbside Chronicle magazine using a credit/debit card or mobile app instead of cash, would you?

- Yes
- No

How did you learn about The Curbside Chronicle?

- A friend, co-worker or family
- Saw a person selling Curbside
- Social media
- Local news story
- At a presentation/in a speech
- In a radio ad
- Saw one in a waiting room
- Other _____

Which best describes your *typical* Curbside Chronicle reading habits?

- I read the entire magazine
- I mainly skim, looking at photos and reading headlines and ~~cutlines~~
- I usually pick and choose specific articles to read
- I don't read the magazine; just buy it to support a vendor

When you are finished with the magazine, do you ever pass it along to friends, family, coworkers, leave it out in a waiting room, public space or otherwise share it?

- Yes
- No

Which features/types of content do you enjoy the most? Check ALL that apply

- Articles about homelessness
- Articles about other social issues
- Articles about arts and entertainment
- Articles about local events
- Vendor-written content
- Local statistics
- Articles from other international street papers
- Good to Know column
- Family-friendly & kid-oriented content
- Vendor Q&As
- Voter guides
- Other _____

Is there anything you'd like to see more of?

Do you ever discuss the material in The Curbside Chronicle with colleagues, family or friends?

- Yes
- No

Has a story or material in The Curbside Chronicle changed your opinion about the issue of homelessness?

- Yes, positively changed my opinion
- Yes, negatively changed my opinion
- No change in opinion

Has a story or material in The Curbside Chronicle led you to seek further information on a subject?

- Yes
- No

What other media outlets do you read, watch, listen to or follow on the web regularly?

Did you know that The Curbside Chronicle is a nonprofit that relies on donations to provide case management and supportive services to vendors?

- Yes
- No

Have you ever donated to The Curbside Chronicle outside of purchasing the magazine?

- Yes
- No

Were you aware that Curbside was planning to open a year-round Flower Shop?

- Yes
- No

**Rank your knowledge and understanding of how
The Curbside Chronicle program works:**

I do not understand I completely understand
1 2 3 4 5

What questions do you have about how it works?

**Considering your buying habits, do you prefer
locally-owned businesses or national chains?**

- Locally-owned
- Chains
- Doesn't matter to me

In a typical week, how often do you dine out?

- Once a week
- Twice a week
- Three to four times a week
- Five or more times a week

**During the next year, are you planning to do any
of the following? Check ALL that apply**

- Purchase a home
- Purchase a car
- Remodel
- Purchase furniture
- Purchase appliances
- Go on a "stay-cation" in OKC
- Vacation somewhere in the state
- Vacation outside of Oklahoma
- Get married
- Have a baby
- Retire
- Utilize financial planning or investment services

What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

How would you describe your gender identity?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender male
- Transgender female
- Gender non-conforming
- Other _____
- Prefer not to say

What is your race?

- White
- Black
- Latino or Hispanic
- Asian
- Native American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Multiple Races
- Other _____
- Prefer not to say

What is your home zip code?

What is your work or school zip code?

What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married, or in a domestic partnership
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Separated
- Prefer not to say

**What is the highest level of education you've
completed?**

- No high school diploma or GED
- High school diploma or GED
- Trade/technical school
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate

What is your annual household income?

- Less than \$20,000
- \$20,000 to 34,999
- \$35,000 to 49,999
- \$50,000 to 74,999
- \$75,000 to 99,999
- \$100,000-150,000
- Greater than \$150,000

Do you currently have children under the age of 18 living in your household?

- Yes
- No

Household size:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+

What is your current employment status?

- Employed full time (36-40 hrs/week)
- Employed part time (up to 36 hrs/week)
- Student
- Retired
- Self employed
- Contract worker
- Day laborer
- Not currently working
- Disabled

What is your current job type?

- Student
- Agriculture
- Business
- Education
- Energy
- Finance
- Food Industry
- Government
- Legal
- Manual labor
- Marketing/Ad
- Media
- Medical
- Nonprofit
- Real estate
- Retail
- Other _____

Additional feedback or comments: