

UBC Social Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Student Report

Melt Collective: Proposing Furniture Leasing as a Sustainable Business

Model Emily Chang, Casey Chen, Jade Yang

University of British Columbia

COMM 486M

March 9, 2018

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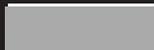
MELT COLLECTIVE

APRIL 2, 2017

COMM 486M

SECTION 202

PROPOSAL BY: SAUDER CREATIVE

Emily Chang | 

Jade Yang | 

Casey Chen | 

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Office of University Council.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Melt Collective recycles plastic material from UBC is looking to turn the recycled material into a product that is sustainable and economically viable. We recommend that Melt Collective produces and leases furnitures - beginning with tables and chairs - to local tenants in Vancouver.

The Pain Point

Students and young professionals are often tenants who move frequently. If furniture is not provided by landlord, then they have to either bring furniture with them (which is a hassle) or buy new ones (which is an upfront cash commitment). Furthermore, if they move again, then they have to worry about moving the furniture with them, or disposing them legally.

The Solution

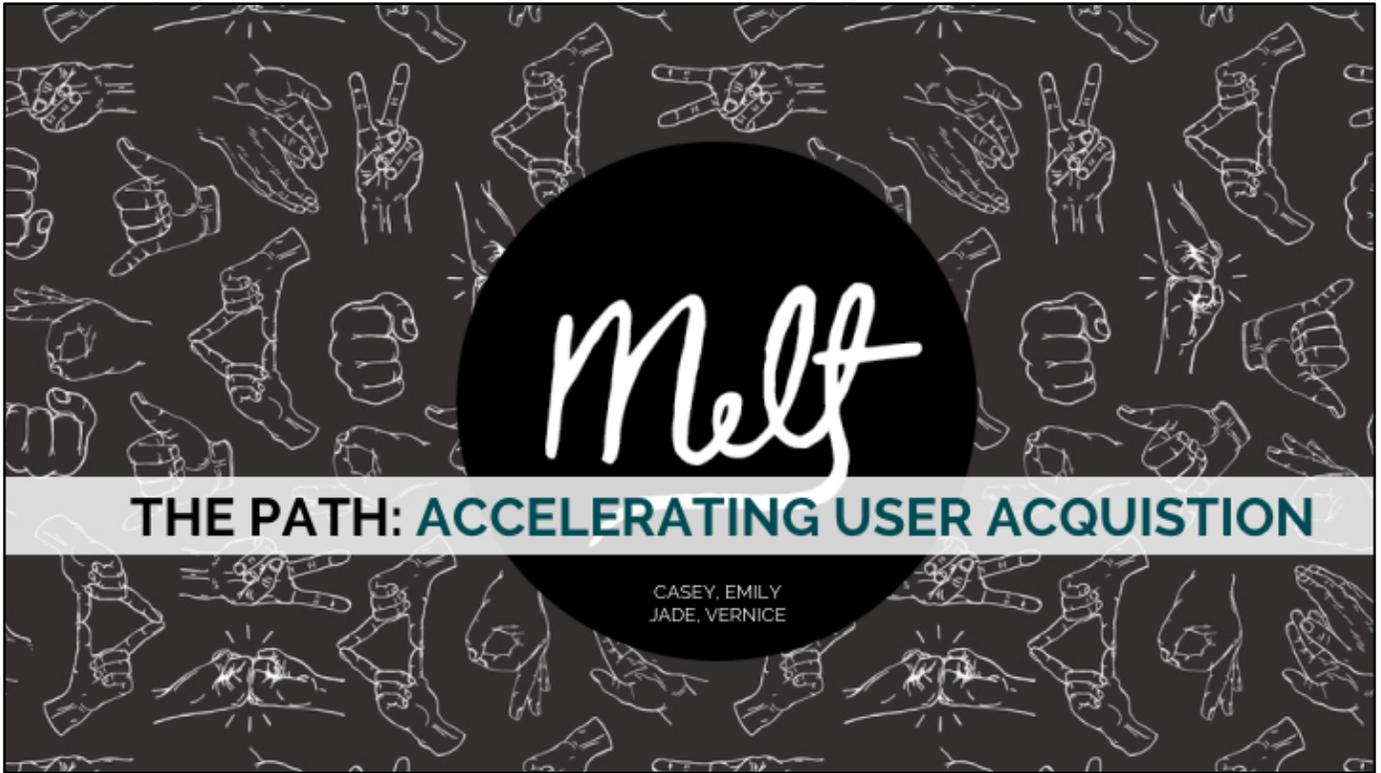
Melt Collective can lease furnitures for a monthly fee and provide delivery and collection services to the local tenants who want no-commitment furnishing, no large upfront cash purchase and no ownership responsibility thereafter.

Competitive Advantage

By offering a monthly subscription program to lease furnitures, Melt Collective reduces customers' switching cost from competitors to try out its furnitures. This business model is something competitors cannot simply copy because while Melt Collective can simply recycle its leased furnitures' materials to produce new ones, competitors cannot do the same with wooden furniture and would therefore have no incentive to offer leasing arrangements. In addition, because Melt Collective creates products using recycled materials with the support of unpaid volunteers, the production line has very low cost of goods sold compared to competitors who need to purchase their raw materials and pay for labour. Therefore, we believe a business model that is difficult to replicate along with low variable costs will allow Melt Collective to not only grow quickly but also directly translate a significant amount of its revenue into earnings.

Risks

There are financial, quality, competition and poison control risks which may result in dire consequences. One of the long-term goals is to work with designers and artists to produce designer furniture pieces and this is a potential financial risk as designers and artists require payment for their collaboration. To mitigate this, royalties can be paid after sale of items. Another risk is quality control as Melt Collective is working with student volunteers to produce the majority of their products. The risk of producing substandard products can be avoided by sorting volunteers to different parts of the production line based on their design and technical skills. There is high competition in the furniture industry and with Ikea, an affordable furniture store giant, beginning to offer sustainable furniture in their stores, Melt Collective must capitalize on their unique services, such as customization of design and affordable rental service, in order to remain competitive. When working with melted plastic, safety is a priority. Poison control risk can be mitigated with proper safety equipment, clothing and training in place.



Good afternoon, Melt Collective and fellow colleagues. Our team – Casey, Emily, Jade – will be exploring the path to Melt Collective successfully breaking out in a focused market with a vision of sustainability, and collaboration.



“...determine a product or value proposition that fits the following profile: an item that is produced in **low quantity**, and sold at a **high price**, made from primarily recycled materials, with a low dependency on third parties for parts.

Examples of products that fit this profile include:

skateboards, furniture, surf fins, UBC-Branded Clipboards.”

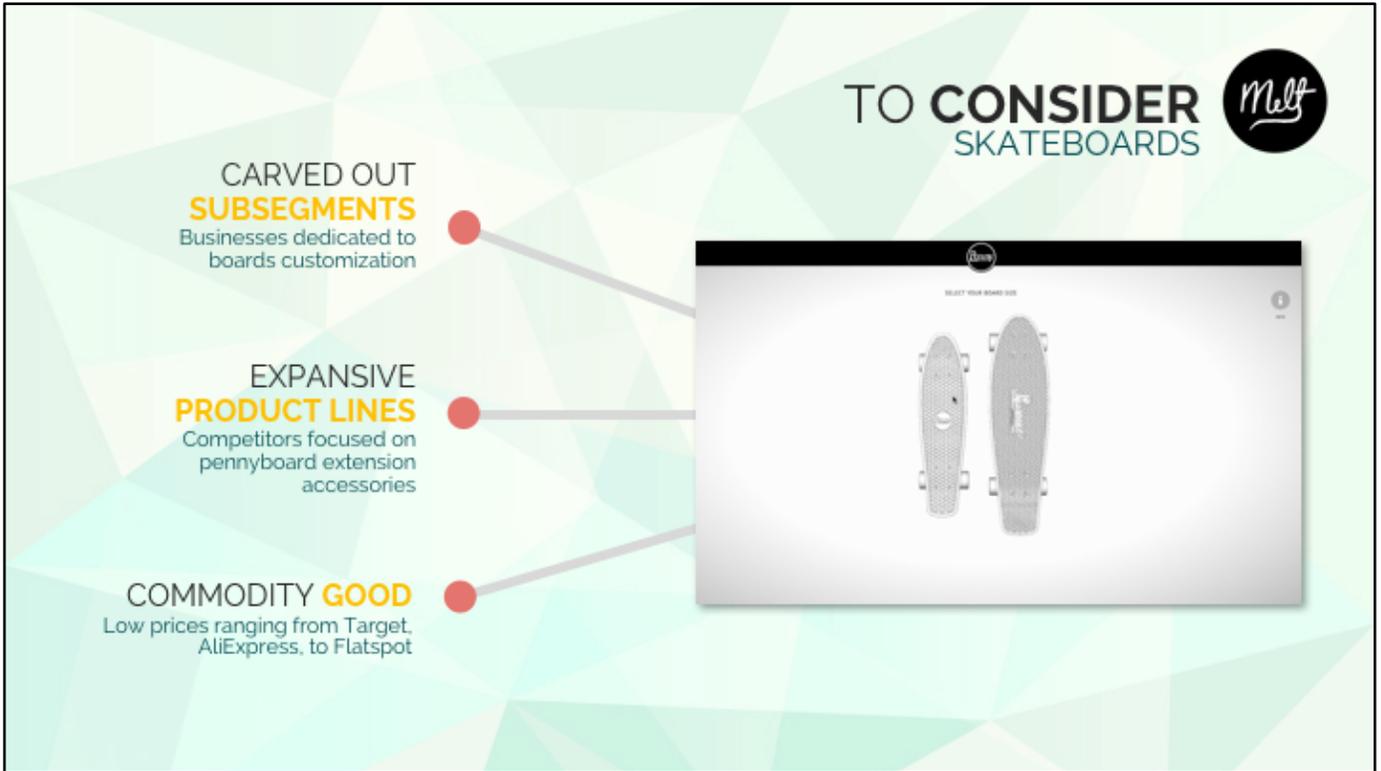
To begin, Melt Collective’s starting challenge consists in understanding what products in what industry would be best aligned with their vision for strong growth potential in achieving market share. Ultimately, we understand Melt Collective is looking to focus on an item produced in low quantities, at a high price with material sourced sustainability.



After looking at the different markets you were interested in purchasing – ranging from clipboards to surf fins, we see the best alignment of both vision and values to flourish within a market less focused on mass manufacturing and slashed prices, and instead more focused on quality and design over functionality: the furniture industry. We are proposing Melt Collective to begin their journey with a focus on exclusively producing tables, like coffee and dining tables, and sitting furniture, such as chairs and stools. By exclusively in one specific product category, further costs on customization are reduced.

Additionally, potential target market prospects were explored; a market that ultimately views furniture as having a shorter life cycle due to frequent moves this customer type participates in: the tenant. Not the homeowner, or home décor enthusiast – but a tenant who opts to rent due to oftentimes never staying in one place for too long. Within the furniture industry, there are competitors between online and brick and mortar retail stores, ranging from IKEA to Wayfair, but Melt Collective stands to differentiate themselves in both values and the unique services provided.

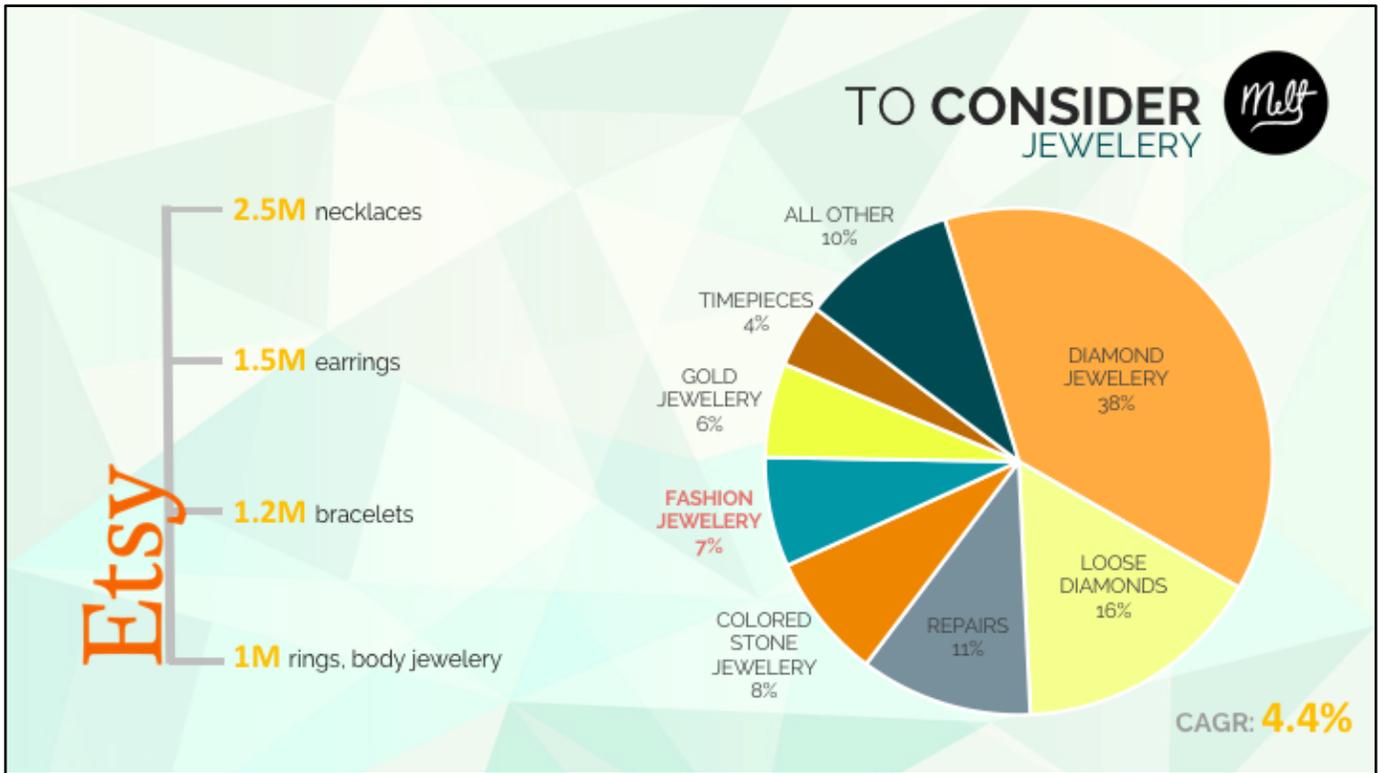
As we especially focus on the unique services provided, this comes into play our financing, where we will be providing both lease and ownership pricing, where monthly subscription prices are offered to rent, and ultimately for these items to be returned, renewed, or purchased. This leads into our proposal of a closed loop sustainable system, where no item is ever thrown out.



The client's message of sustainability and community collaboration are lost in the world of skateboards and even pennyboards. There are companies exclusively focused on advertising a skateboarding lifestyle, with product customizability right down to the bolts on the board. With the amount of parts not made of plastic, there would be heavy amounts of outsourcing or requiring the purchasing of manufacturer components to make in-house, and then that begins to lose Melt Collective's vision of creating a closed loop of sustainability on plastics. Additionally, with cheap prices that deliver similar value from any large retailer like Target, or e-Commerce sites like AliExpress, or even brick and mortar, local Vancouver stores like Flatspot – Melt Collective would be one of many, with limited capability in extending their product lines into skateboard accessories.

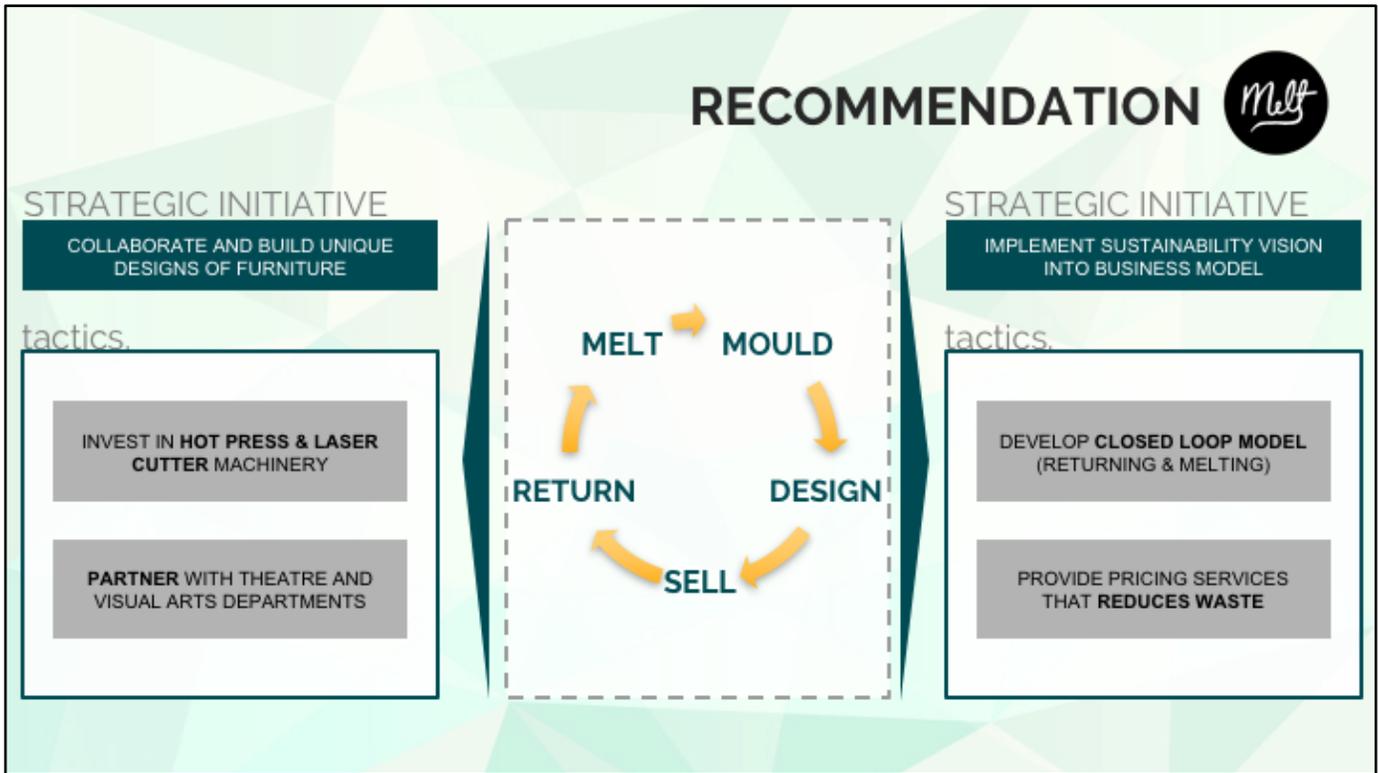


Plastic protective accessories, like laptop or phone covers, are not very profitable, nor exciting to break in. The market comprises of a vast variety of offerings, and ultimately, the brands that do manage to differentiate themselves are often focused on functionality (like the Otterbox) or on unique materials. There are thousands of suppliers operating the market, with prices constantly being slashed due to mass manufacturers and wholesalers – leading to a highly competitive market where the values and message of Melt Collective would be lost. With low margins, and an inability to differentiate based on functionality or unique materials, this is not the right market for Melt Collective to begin in.



Why should we not do jewelry? The CAGR in total sales of jewelry and watches is 4.4% and the total market value reached approximately \$74.7 billion as of 2014. According to Market Realist, approximately 37.8% of total sales in this industry goes towards diamond jewelry, followed by loose diamonds at 16%. If Melt Collective were to penetrate this market, they would fall under 'Fashion Jewelry', consisting of only 8% of the total sales.

Although this fashion jewelry may seem niche, it is saturated with competitors. Given that Melt Collective's fashion jewelry is likely to fall under artisan and handmade goods, we can visualize just how competitive the market is by browsing 'jewelry' on Etsy.ca, the dominant player in retail artisan and handmade goods. On Etsy, there are over 2.5 million necklaces, 1.5 million earrings, 1.2 million bracelets, 1 million rings and body jewelry combined, and just under half a million in jewelry sets and brooches combined. From just browsing Etsy, we can see that competition is fierce and Melt Collective may take years to show steady signs of growth if they choose to enter this market.



Recommendations

Our approach for Melt Collective focuses on two strategic initiatives: collaborating and building unique designs of both tables and sitting furniture, as well as implementing the sustainable vision into Melt Collective’s business model.

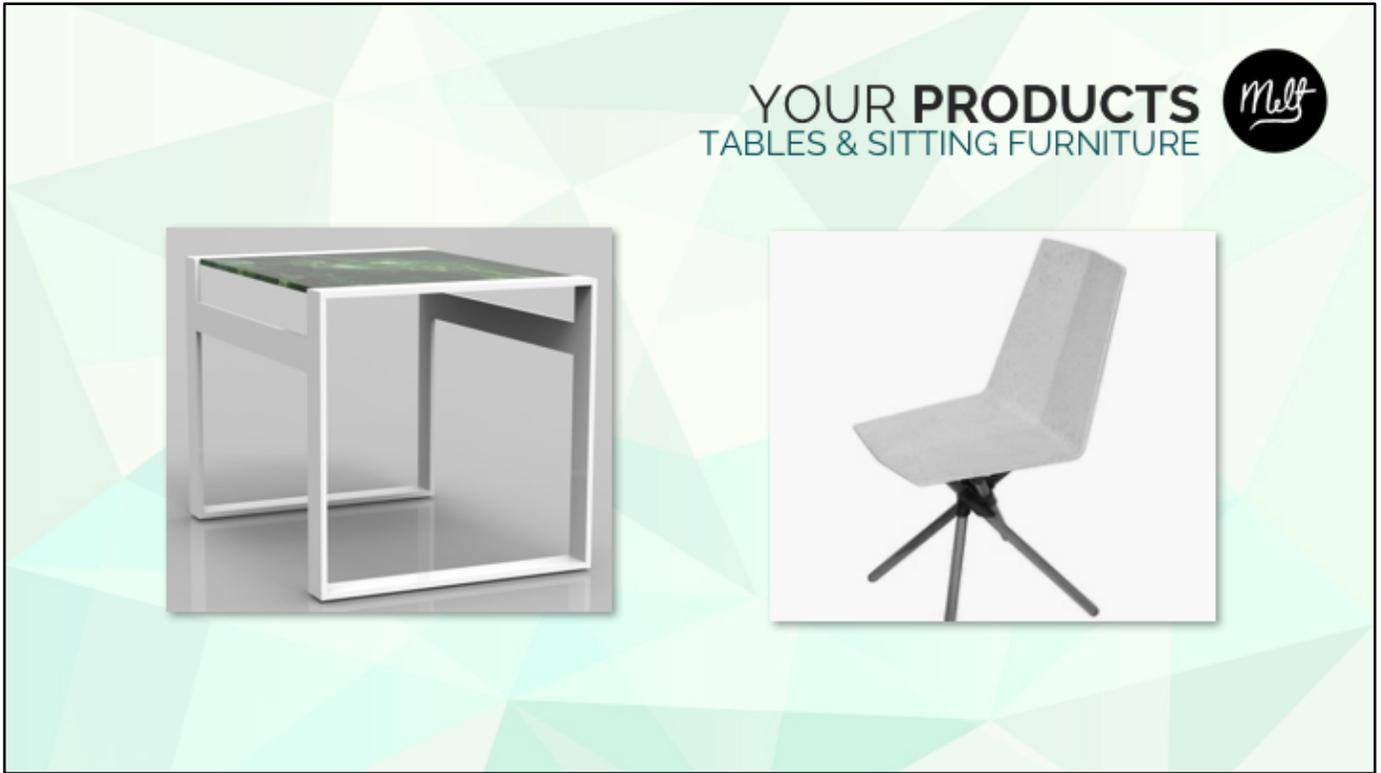
Collaborate and Build Unique Furniture Designs: In Melt Collective offering a selection of sleekly designed furniture, such as tables and chairs, for an affordable price; this will appeal to tenants who are looking for unique pieces beyond the well-known cheap IKEA pieces, at similar affordable prices. These unique designs are first generated by the purchase of a hot press machine, that will allow the creation of larger pieces – and through melt and joining each part, will remove the need to purchase any metal bolts or nuts. Additionally, with the purchase of a laser cutter, this will allow uniqueness and precision. No longer is Melt Collective limited to an injection molder that focuses on small items, but instead can be moved to large scale production with exclusivity on variations of tables and chairs.

Additionally, by collaborating with students whom have a background in UBC Theatre Production Design and UBC Visual Arts. These students will act as volunteers to support Melt Collective in furniture design. They are highly incentivized volunteers

who will put forth their best work as they must present appealing project portfolios with images and references to potential employers in the design industry. In the long-run, after gaining traction in their sales, Melt Collective has the opportunity to design limited edition furniture in collaboration with professional artists and designers for a higher profit margin. This will allow Melt Collective to attract both the earlier mentioned currently out of reach target market, the home décor enthusiasts, and perhaps even the art collectors.

Implement Sustainability Vision into Business Model: To create a closed-loop sustainable business model, every piece of furniture made by Melt Collective will be 100% recycled and remodelled to become another piece of furniture. Customers who have purchased from Melt Collective in the past will be able to return to Melt Collective with the furniture they had once purchased to get it remodelled, for a fee. This will reduce waste and reduces commitment to any one design. Additionally, this will enable Melt Collective to benefit from higher customer retention and remain financially sustainable in the long-run. Additionally, for customers that lease, we allow them to also return the product at the end of their contract, or to purchase outright at a discount. This will also ensure no waste disposable and further propoagte the closed loop, sustainable system.

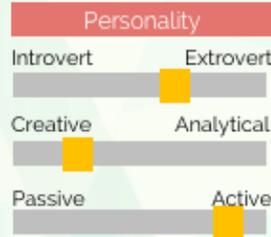
Ultimately, the goal is to make sustainable living widespread by first targeting soon-to-be tenants, which make up approximately 4 million households in the Greater Vancouver area (Globe and Mail). After penetrating the Vancouver market, we suggest that Melt Collective begin offering their products worldwide. To do so, Melt Collective could directly sell products to furniture stores located in major cities.



We propose taking a look at the furniture industry. This is an industry that doesn't focus on how functional a product is, or how low a prices can go. This is an industry that instead focuses on design: where pieces with stories and aesthetic appeal is prioritized over mass commodity manufacturing. **This** is a platform each piece produced has the chance to stand out.

As customers, top-of-mind awareness when it comes to furniture are competitors, like IKEA. IKEA's services are focused on prices and diverse offerings. We are not proposing an imitation of IKEA's business model. However, we are proposing that there is growth potential in being able to carry Melt Collective's sustainable, closed loop system that unites Vancouver artists and UBC students in creating unique, affordable pieces.

YOUR CUSTOMERS



**UBC
ACCEPTANCE**
2013

**MOVED INTO
TOTEM PARK**
2013-2014

**BASEMENT SUITE
WITH ROOMIE**
2014-2015

**MOVED OUT,
LIVED ALONE**
2015-2016

GRADUATION
2017

NEW PLACE?
?

Meet Emily. Emily is a 22 year old recent graduate of UBC. She moved into Totem Park in her first year as an international student, but soon found she preferred to live off campus so she could do more activities in Kitsilano. Her and her new roommate, a friend she met in Psych 101, moved into a one year lease in a basement suite. She didn't want to buy any fancy furniture for the common area, and she didn't know where she'd be living by next year. Eventually, Emily finished her lease, and after too many fights on who was going to clean the dishes, she decided to live alone in a smaller space. Now, after graduation with a job coming up, Emily is ready to rent a new place.



So why Emily? Well, tenants – as opposed to homeowners, home décor enthusiasts, and art collectors – are right on the tip of Melt Collective’s market. They are the client’s soon-to-be customers, because people like Emily prioritize a few key factors: affordability, ease of moving furniture from home to home, and ease of furniture disposal. She isn’t ever quite staying in a home for long, and with each space changing in dimensions, purchasing high quality pieces for long-term use just doesn’t work.

As of 2011, renters in Greater Vancouver area make up approximately 3,996,184.50 households, 30% of all households (Globe and Mail). Beyond tenants, we have considered home décor enthusiasts who may prefer more complex, intricate pieces – all the way to a third tier of customers, art collectors, who may not see furniture other than pieces from famous artists as art. In the short-term, we are focusing exclusively in appealing to tenants.



After mapping out Melt Collective’s competitors in the original strategy canvas earlier, we can see that with these strategic initiatives in focusing on particular one-of-a-kind designs from students in both the theater and visual arts departments, offering a financing model that encourages Melt’s primary customer, tenants, to lease furniture and reduce waste when they move into their next home by returning the furniture – or ultimately, purchasing the already affordable furniture outright and returning for melting purposes when they tire of a design. Building upon this closed loop sustainable business model allows for points of differentiation in pricing when it comes to affordability, niche designs, closer alignment and implementation of Melt’s values, and offering diverse financing options.

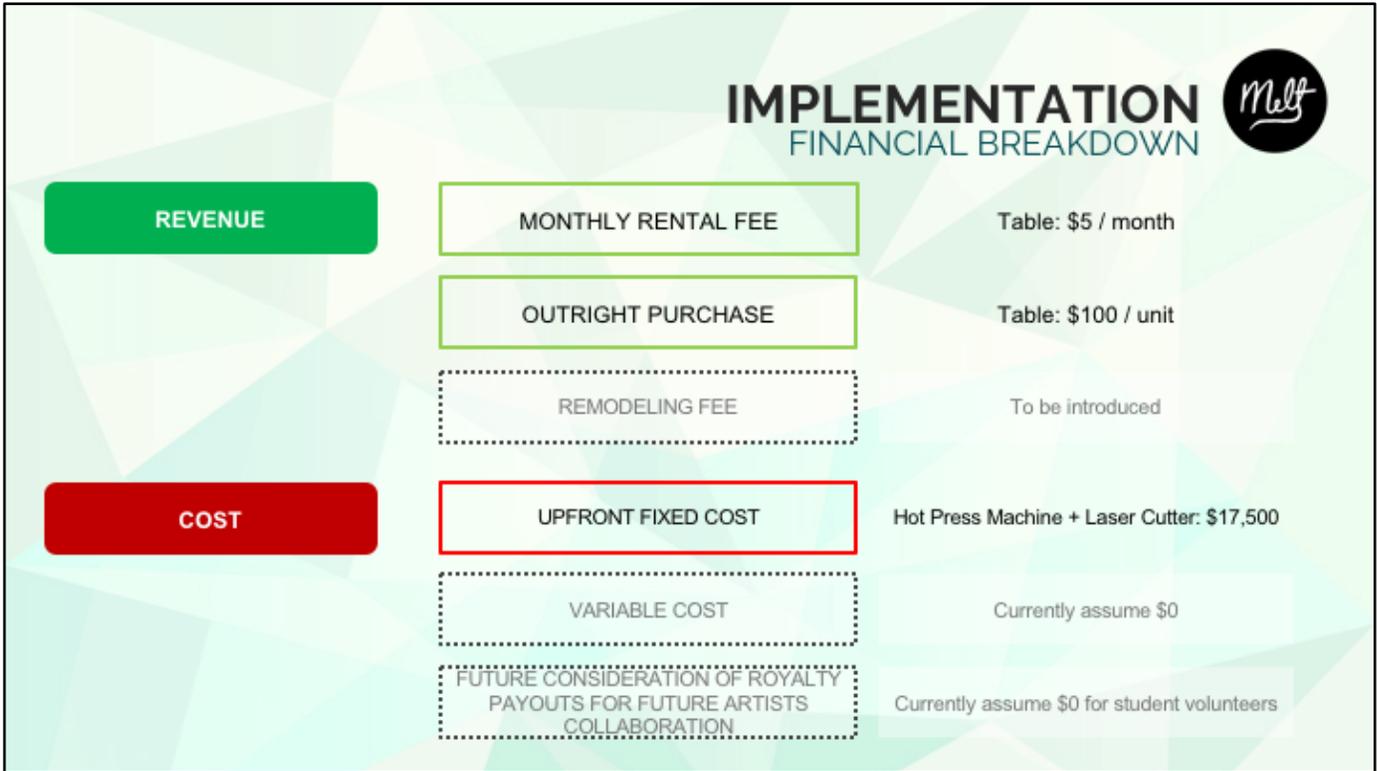


Melt Collective can offer their customers two options at checkout:

1. Lease
2. Purchase

Melt Collective will be able to offer furniture rentals to their tier 1 target market, the tenants who are constantly moving residences, or generally don't want to be committed to one design or style for a given period. Melt Collective should offer their most basic and classic furniture pieces for customers who choose to lease as it will improve throughput rate and eliminate the need to place effort into design.

We estimate that the lease price is \$4.99 per month and this price depends on the size and sale value of the furniture. Since there are approximately 4 million tenant households in Greater Vancouver Area (Globe and Mail), we believe that this no-commitment furnished lifestyle will enable us to attract many households locally, and even with UBC students and new graduates as well. The second option that Melt Collective can offer to their customers is to purchase the furniture pieces at checkout. By offering two payment options, Melt Collective is able to attract a range of customers from low-income to high-income.

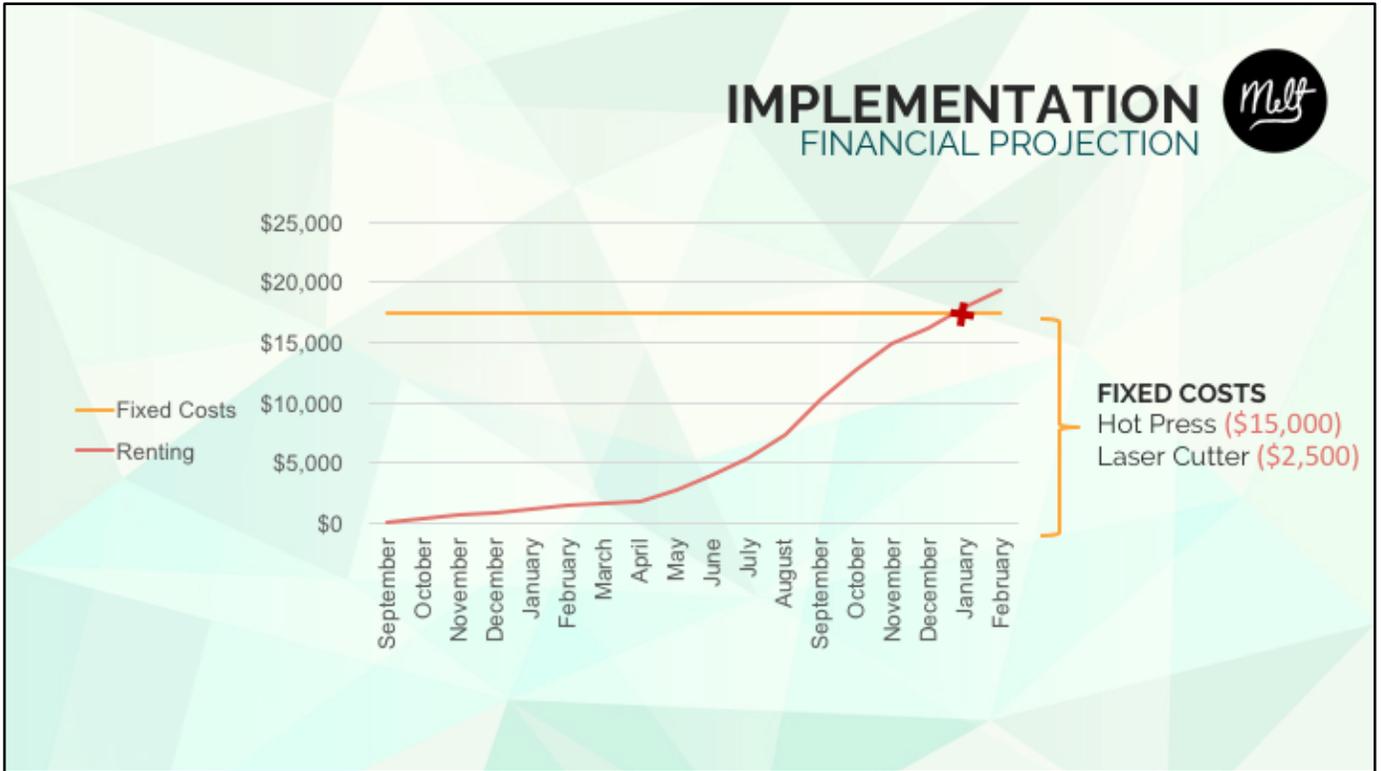


REVENUE

We see three possible revenue streams for Melt Collective – monthly rental fees, outright purchase revenue, and remodeling fees. In the beginning, we recommend Melt Collective to focus on growing rental customers and thereby monthly rental fee. In addition to a free trial period, a \$5 per month rental fee offers a very attractive alternative to tables at competitors’ averaging \$150+ that may potentially be only used for less than one year. An outright purchase price of \$100 per table is also significantly less than a basic table’s average market price. Lastly, Melt Collective can later introduce a remodeling fee for customers who wish to return their previously purchased table to a different furniture that Melt Collective introduces later on. This not only create a closed-loop sustainable business model but also higher customer retention rate.

COST

To build tables and other large pieces of furniture, we recommend Melt Collective to go ahead and acquire a hot press machine, as well as a laser cutter in order to create more unique designs. Based on the cost estimates provided, the total upfront cost is therefore \$17,500. For simplicity, we assume that material cost is currently the only significant variable cost, and since all materials used for building tables are recycled plastic, we assume that variable cost is currently zero. In the future, as Melt Collective collaborates with designers to introduce classic tables beyond the current basic version, there may be royalty payouts to those designers. However, we assume currently that all designers employed are simply student volunteers.

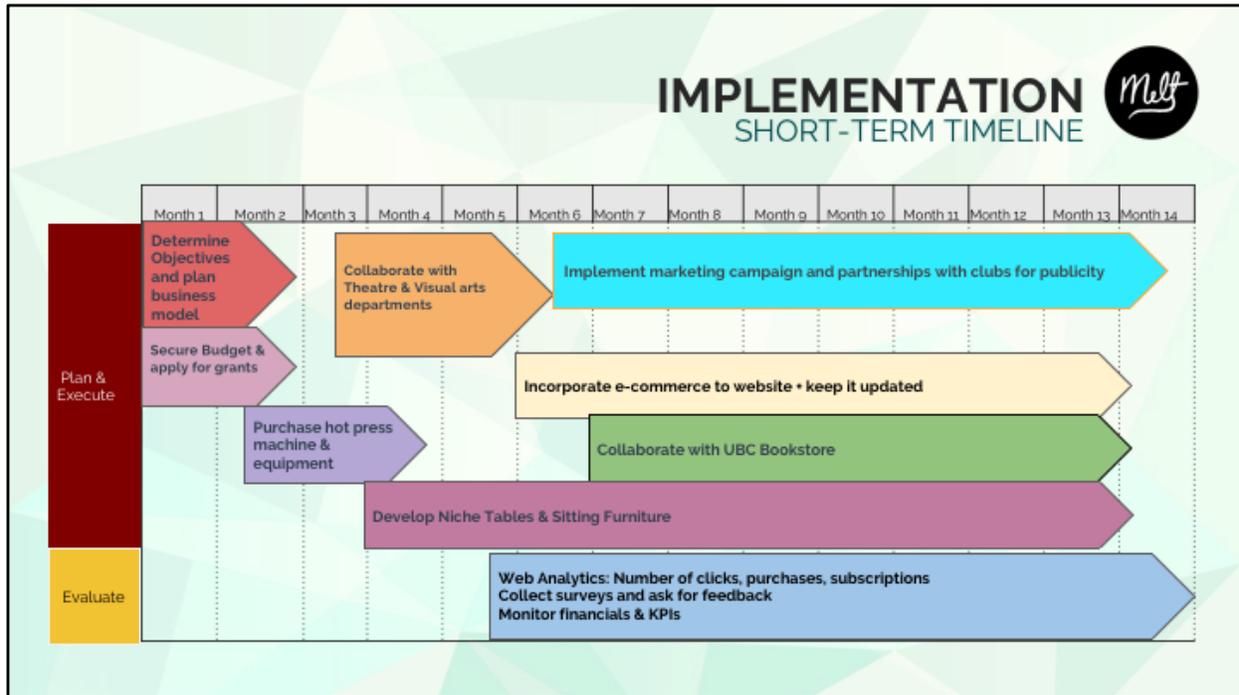


Looking at financial projections, we expect Melt Collective to breakeven in 16 months with 363 rental units. This is based on the assumption of gradually increasing growth rate of users for the first 7 months and accelerates thereafter as tractions pick up. Since are target market for the first year is tenants within UBC from September to April, we estimated rental period to be average 8 months. Starting from year 2 we increase the average rental period to 12 months as we expand our target customer base.



Since Melt Collective is financially restricted as they have currently have low funding. We would like to recommend a few low-cost marketing tactics which will enable Melt Collective to gain traction in their growth. Firstly, we suggest Melt Collective to collaborate with UBC Ambassadors, a team of student tour guides who take UBC visitors and guests around campus. Through this collaboration, UBC Ambassadors will bring UBC visitors to Melt Collective's location and talk about the organization's objectives and mission towards making sustainability affordable and widespread. Secondly, we suggest Melt Collective to offer free workshops and a tour of the production line to UBC students and elementary schools across lower mainland which will improve brand awareness.

By educating students about sustainability through fun and engaging workshops, Melt Collective may be able to influence a trend towards sustainable living. Thirdly, Melt Collective could sponsor high traffic and populated UBC buildings and Vancouver landmarks with their sustainable furniture pieces. With many people coming and going and utilizing the furniture pieces that Melt Collective has to offer, we hope that this sponsorship could not only improve brand awareness but also become a physical display to showcase durability and excellent design. Lastly, Melt Collective must create more buzz around the impact of giving life to new products by recycling plastic. For instance, Melt collective can use social media to launch a contest with winning prizes for the best creative video that students come up with related to upcycling collected plastic.



In order to incorporate our strategies mentioned, Melt Collective should make sure that its goal & vision is aligned with all the members and partners. The next step will be to plan the financials and prepare the budget. After estimating the approximate costs and possible revenue streams, Melt Collective should apply for available grants as mentioned: Vancity, Federal grants, Venture (Social enterprises grants), especially when it comes to purchasing the equipment and dealing with the upfront investment costs. For a list of leads generated on potential grants Melt Collective could pursue, please refer to Appendix E.

Next, after purchasing the hot press and laser cutter, the client should begin initiating and collaborating with the Theatre and Visual Arts departments to plan and discuss about possible designs for furniture. Meanwhile, as the products are finalized and produced, the development of eCommerce functionality would begin – where photos of these products are taken and posted onto the site for purchase. Once the e-commerce function is built into the existing site, Melt Collective can begin to explore our proposal of a no-cost, marketing campaign: with partnerships such as with the UBC Bookstore, or other UBC clubs showing interest in promoting green enterprises such as Common Energy, Melt Collective should also showcase some products in public spaces (i.e. sponsoring major landmarks, like The Next). In regards to the UBC Bookstore, we propose it instead be a platform to showcase the designs of students, but not to purchase. As with all showcases in all different locations, the showcase will instead feature the designs of students while re-directing any potential buyers to instead, their e-commerce store.

As a final measure of a no-cost marketing campaign, we also propose a “drop-by work area”, where with the additional leftover material from develop the tables and sitting furniture, visitors can drop by the facility and design their own keychains, necklaces, and small plastic trinkets with help from the student volunteers in producing their designs with the leftover pieces into the injection moulder.

IMPLEMENTATION LONG-TERM TIMELINE



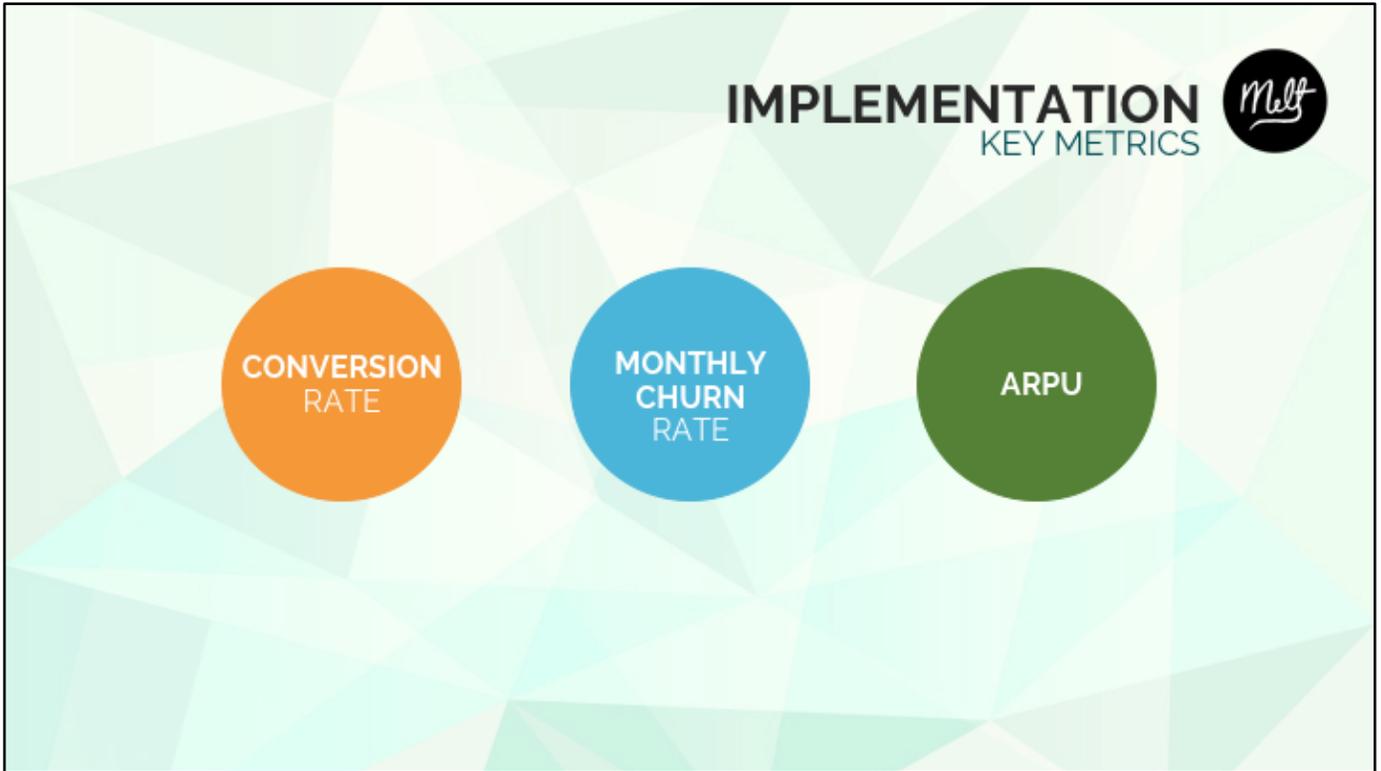
2018, SPRING
Seek funding from
angels

2018, SUMMER
Scale operations

2018-2019, FALL
Seek VC financing
round

2019
Seek additional
rounds

In the long-term implementation, of bringing Melt Collective into a functioning business, we propose Melt to be seeking funding from angels once we've gotten our eCommerce site with the marketing tactics in place. As Melt brings awareness of their business and continues to seek funding from angels, we will additionally scale operations by the time of 2018, as Melt Collective has come into some revenue. Additionally, Melt is to then seek financing for the year, following into 2019 to achieve new growth, and onwards.



The three key metrics we recommend Melt Collective to use are conversion rate to monitor the number of customers that continue to use the furniture after the free trial period, monthly churn rate for customers that return their furniture later on, and Average Revenue per User as Melt Collective continue to introduce higher end products.

IMPLEMENTATION RISKS & MITIGATION



RISK	PROBABILITY	SEVERITY	MITIGATION
Toxic plastics poisoning volunteers and visitors			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandate protection for all when approaching melting grounds Proper education regarding poison control and safety procedures
Substandard products			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose to work with volunteers who are passionate about sustainability and identify with Melt Collective's values
Inability to out compete major competitors			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage unique designs through student collaboration by increasing the customizability and design of their products Continue to push for affordable rental pricing
Increasing variable costs			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pay royalties to the designers only after a product sold

Poison Risk: Toxic Plastics Poisoning Volunteers and Visitors

When working with plastics, there is a potential health and safety risk of poisonous fumes leaking into the environment. In our conversation with the client, they mentioned that the facility will be well ventilated and steps will be taken to protect visitors and volunteers inside the facility. In order to avoid poisonous fumes from coming into contact with people, Melt Collective must insist that all volunteers and visitors are required to gear up with appropriate clothing and equipment that protects against poisonous gases prior to entering the facility when products are being created. Proper education and training regarding poison control and the potential harm will also benefit volunteers greatly.

Quality Risk: Producing Substandard Products

Melt Collective's goal is to become an established organization that produces customizable, high quality and sustainable products delivered through excellent customer service. To attract customers in this niche target market requires an emphasis on the quality of goods and services provided. Since Melt Collective's production line relies on working with volunteers, there is a potential risk that volunteers may be unable to create quality products and demands and customization requests of the customers. However, this can be

easily avoided if Melt Collective can differentiate the volunteers based on skill level. Sorting highly technical volunteers into the production portion of the operations and placing highly artistic volunteers to the design phase of the operations will improve the quality and design of the products. Furthermore, working with volunteers who truly believe in the value of zero-waste and sustainable living will motivate volunteers to produce quality sustainable products. By working with passionate individuals, Melt Collective may be able to improve their customer service experience and brand image.

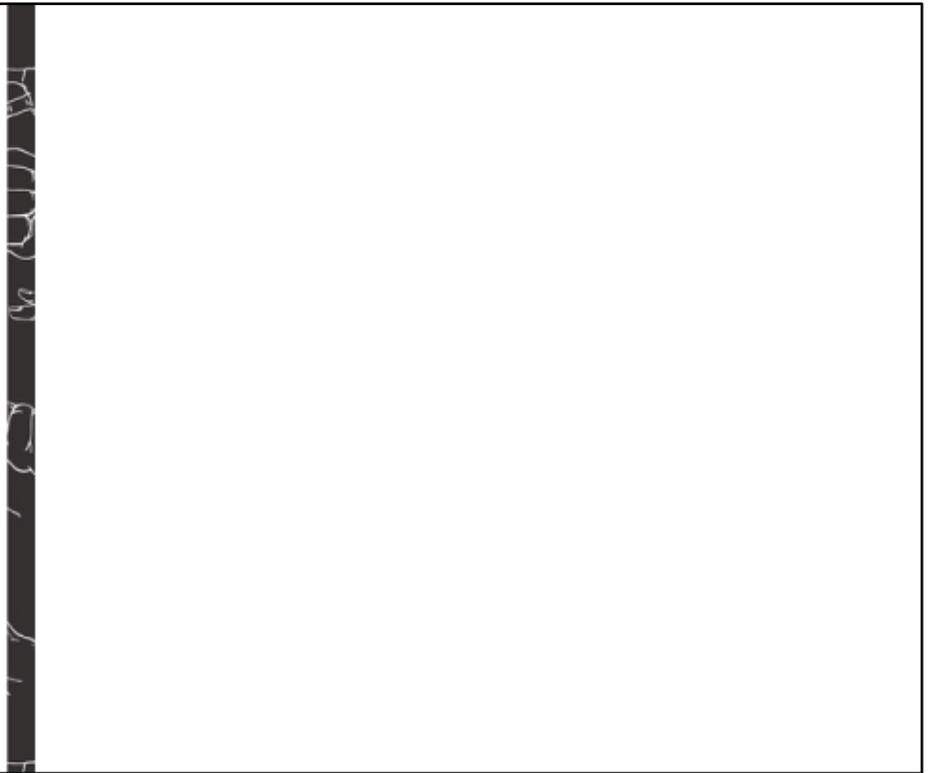
High Competition Risk: Inability to out Compete Major Competitors

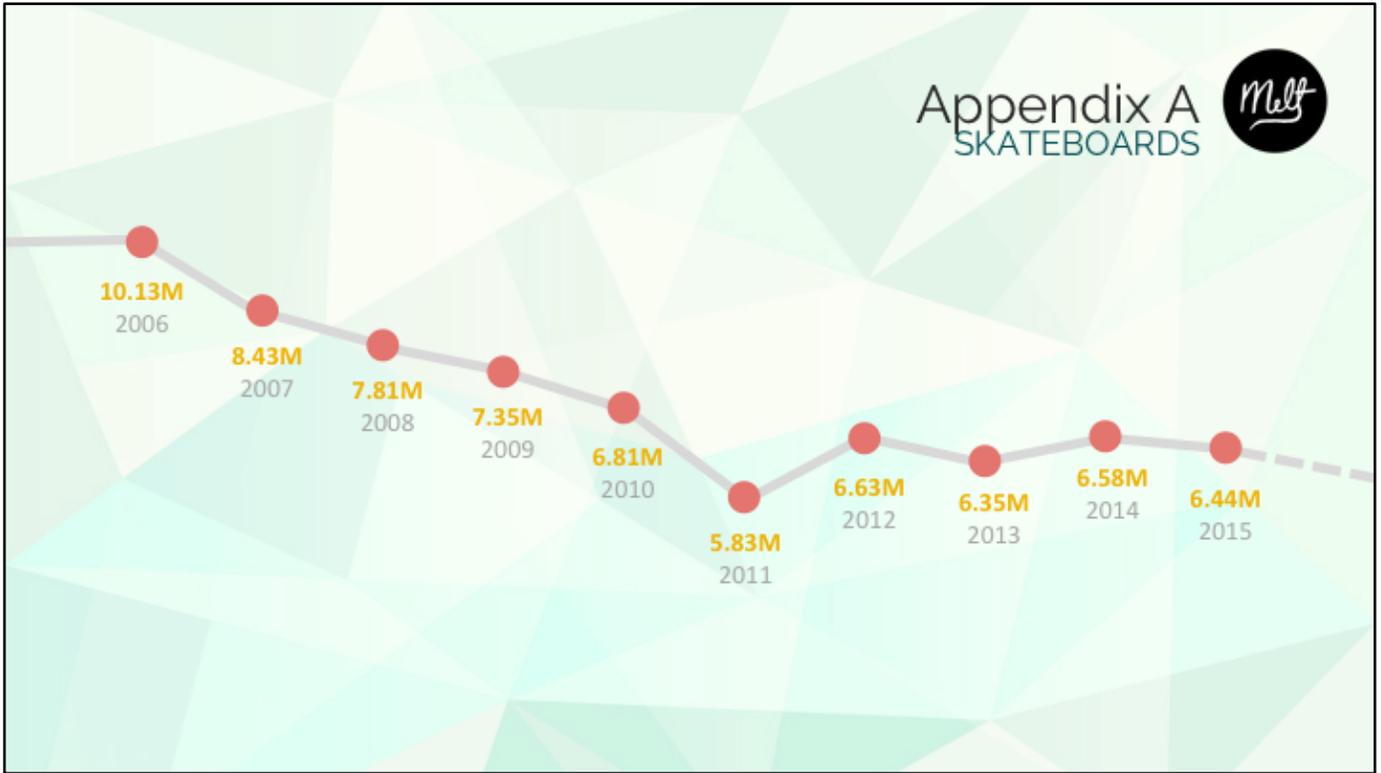
Melt Collective wants to sell sustainable furniture which caters to niche markets.

In this niche market, there are large, well-known furniture businesses such as Ikea who are also selling sustainable furniture. Since Melt Collective wants to produce high margin furniture, it may be difficult to compete with a low-cost giant like Ikea. As such, there runs the risk of Melt Collective being out competed by large, mass production companies who have lower prices. To combat this problem, Melt Collective should place extra marketing efforts to sell themselves as a sustainable furniture store that produces highly customizable, high quality and specifically made-to-order pieces of sustainable furniture. This will be Melt Collective's competitive advantage and can allow them to charge higher prices for this unique service.

Financial Risk: Increasing Variable Costs

With any start-up company, excellent control of financials and cash flow will influence the sustainability and success of the business in the long-run. Since Melt Collective will be working with local artists and designers, a very costly operation, we recommend that Melt Collective pay them only after the product they have designed has been sold. This is beneficial for Melt Collective beyond just financial control as it provides an incentive for the artists and designers to produce top quality work with the intention for sale and acting in the best interest of the company. Ultimately, Melt Collective will pay royalties to their artists and designers upon sale of their products.





As we can see here, the number of participants – ranging from children to adults – in skateboarding decreased by 3.5M between 2006 and 2014, dropping as low as 5.83M in 2011. Although these statistics reflect our neighbours from the US, it is arguably even more limited in a city with few skateparks and rainy days overwhelming the majority of the year.

Appendix B UBC CLIPBOARDS



LOW MARGINS

Mass production creates cheap prices in plastic covers

LIMITED CAPABILITY DIFFERENTIATION

Focus not on functional level, or differentiated material type

COMMODITY GOOD

Low prices ranging from Target, AliExpress, to Flatspot



So why not clipboards? Low production costs which seem like an easy production, especially through distribution via an e-commerce store and the UBC bookstore. However, after analyzing the e-commerce clipboard industry, we strongly suggest against this idea. There are hundreds of websites that offer customizable clipboards, some of the top websites to name are Etsy, Printer Studio, Zazzle, 4Imprint, and PersonalizationMall. Their prices start as low as \$10 and they are able to produce customizable clipboards in bulk for an even lower price. Non-customized clipboards can be found at Staples for only \$5.25 per piece, and at UBC Bookstore specifically, they go for \$8.95 per piece. Much like protective accessories, to compete with these prices and numerous competitors will be a difficult task for Melt Collective, when they could instead focus on breaking into a unique, focused market.

Appendix C SURF FINS



WIND, NOT
GROUND SWELL



MISALIGNMENT OF
MESSAGE



Appendix D RESOURCES



Our research will investigate the economic feasibility of the variations of plastic products Melt Collective could offer, through the research of the sourced plastics found at UBC[1] - specifically, polypropylene (known as “PP”), high-density polyethylene (known as “HDPE”), and polyethylene terephthalate (known as “PET”).

The recommendation is for Melt Collective to produce a select line of furniture for both homes and businesses that share the same zero-waste values. Ideally, the business would start in-house producing various chairs, tables, lamps, wall fixtures, and carpets, using the injection molder and shredder that the client already owns, but we will continue to assess if this is a viable production outcome as the project progresses.

This offered line of furniture will primarily be designed and produced through collaboration with local artists for one-of-a-kind pieces, where Melt Collective offers the available plastics (e.g. the more malleable polypropylene, or the more dense HDPE, or the more fibrous PET) for open designs that allow select local artists to work on an usual but unique medium. Upon the showcasing of our pieces through our various distribution channels, Melt Collective would feature the artist’s name and background and the product line they have designed.

Manufacturing process will be assumed to offer enough HDPE, PET, and polypropylene to offer a variety of plastic materials sourced; we recognize HDPE is found the least in terms of volume at UBC, therefore will ensure product

recommendations using HDPE will be minimal (“exclusive, high-end offerings of the product line”)

Appendix E RESOURCES | FUNDING



enviroFund program
[View Here](#)



Government
of Canada Gouvernement
du Canada

Natural Resources Canada

federal grants
[View Attached Speaking Notes](#)

Green VC

venture capital
[View Attached Speaking Notes](#)

enviroFund Program: investments up to \$25 000 for local projects
access here: <https://www.vancity.com/AboutVancity/InvestingInCommunities/Grants/>

Federal Grants: Ranges from 000s to 00,000s
access leads here:
<http://canadabusiness.ca/managing-your-business/day-to-day-operations/environment-and-business/funding-and-incentive-programs-for-greening-your-business/>
<http://canadabusiness.ca/programs/canadian-industry-program-for-energy-conservation-1/F-S1/>
<http://canadabusiness.ca/programs/canada-small-business-financing-program-1/F-S1/>
<http://www.grants-loans.org/qa/qa.php?id=Green-Business-Grants-Canada-Canada>

Local Venture Capital for Green Businesses: conferences, funding
Access Here: <http://www.greenvc.org/>