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An Analysis Through Mercom Corporation

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Dr. Martin

POLI 491

28 April 2021

COVID-19 and Small Business

An Analysis Through Mercom Corporation

Introduction and Thesis:

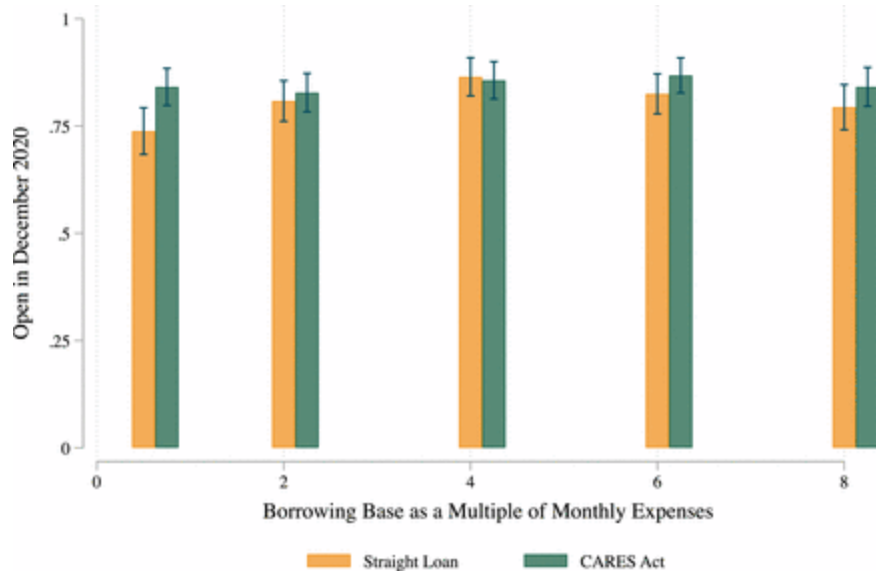
An analysis of Mercom Corporation, a technology firm for the Federal Government portrays advantages during the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic by adjusting to remote working. COVID-19 revealed a persistent challenge facing many small businesses in Georgetown County and maintaining sustainability. However, Mercom Corporation worked around the pandemic to maintain productivity and ensure safety for all employees. Mercom is a leading example on proper preparedness to unprecedented events. I will be examining and analyzing Mercom's response and procedures to the pandemic through my experience working there and interviews conducted with employees. I will be focusing on how other small businesses in Georgetown County can learn from Mercom's success from preparing in advance for similar events and to consider remote work as a new norm. I will also highlight the economic benefits of remote work environments for other businesses and organizations in Georgetown County

Focusing on Sustainability Goals: Eight-Economic Development, Nine-Innovation, and Eleven-Sustainable Cities and Communities. Goal Eight highlights Mercom's economic growth as a small business, along with Mercom's fulltime employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. The target within Goal 8 is to increase more people to work in Georgetown, by using remote work this allows for a more inclusive workplace in Georgetown Countyⁱ. Goal 9 promotes inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fosters innovation. Incorporating Mercom's role in providing and fostering innovation to government agencies and making a difference in creating innovation, setting off a chain reaction. This targets financing for small-scale industries, this is imperative for the survival during a crisisⁱⁱ. This report emphasizes Goal Eleven, it promotes sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. Goal Eleven targets reducing air pollution, and minimizes

public transport by remotely workingⁱⁱⁱ. The report focuses on how Mercom can lead by example to other small business, economically disadvantaged business, or women owned small business. The report features how Mercom operates sustainably friendly though the pandemic with experience and how that made Mercom successful.

Given that Mercom Corporation is a technology firm specializing in providing innovative solutions to the Federal Government, it requires significant government contract work. This would ideally be seen as hindrance to working remotely, however, Mercom successfully worked around this. Despite vicissitude, Georgetown County managed to overcome and maintain success. My research and observations focus on how Mercom accomplished success through the pandemic and even having one of their most successful years because of COVID-19 while remotely working. Although the COVID-19 pandemic, that has unfortunately affected the Georgetown County heavily for over a year, Mercom successfully adapted to the pandemic in order to give insight to small business to acquire similar results through remote working. This report utilizes other reports and case studies to compare to Mercom's operation during COVID-19 and small businesses in general.

Literature Review:



Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) conducted a research on “The impact of COVID-19 on small business outcomes and expectations. This research was intended to reflect and provide insight into the economic impact of the coronavirus in 2019 on small businesses (PNAS, Research Article)^{iv}. The results of this report research were drawn from a survey of more than 5,000 small businesses. A timeline of this research paper is crucial to have a proper understanding of the findings. In early 2020, the United States had mass layoffs and closures nationwide in order to maintain employee safety. There were various beliefs of when the United States will “open” again were common^{vii}. The figure above displays the hypothetical differences in the United States that the propensity to remain open under different openings^{vii}. The survey conducted had 43 questions regarding COVID-19 and the lockdown effect on small businesses, including how they respond, how successful they are currently, and what they plan to do. The research concluded that majority of small business will have to cut expenses, take additional debt, or declare bankruptcy in result of COVID-19.

Most importantly other results concluded from this study “highlights the importance of well-designed and sustained economic public health policy measures”^{viii}.

Mercom Corporation is a Women Owned Small Business (WOSB) and would have qualified for this survey and research. Mercom, however, has not had the challenges that other small businesses in this survey faced. Mercom was prepared for remote work and easily moved to remote work due to its past experiences with hurricane evacuations.

Mercom Corporation, located in Pawley’s Island SC, (an area prone to hurricanes and flooding) had occasional experience working remotely prior to COVID-19. This prevented having to lay-off or having unemployed employees during the start of COVID-19. This is a huge difference, compared to majority of the small business that participated in the PNAS survey. Small businesses were not prepared for remote work; leading to lay-offs and unemployment, and closure of the small businesses. Mercom’s strength was their preparedness for COVID-19 and to any natural disaster that might occur. Mercom also had a well-designed and ensured to sustain economic public health policy measures throughout adjusting to the pandemic. Working remotely in 2020-2021, and prior remote work experience ensured that employees were safe. Safety as Mercom’s priority and was key to the success Mercom had during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Empirical Data and Case Study:

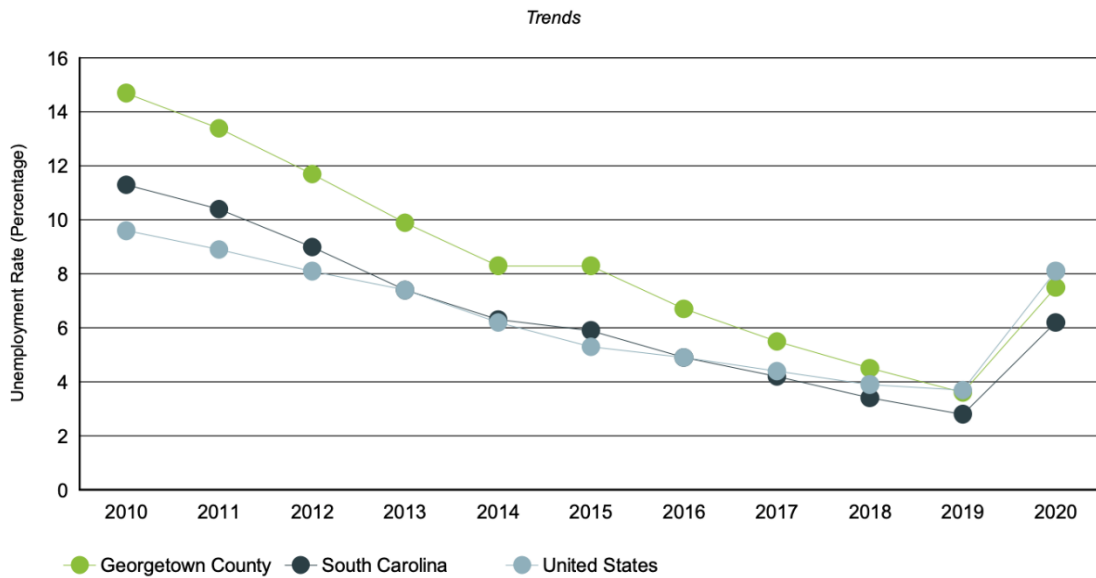
When examining how Mercom Corporation maintained productivity and success during an on-going pandemic, it is beneficial that other small business adapts more sustainable methods to promote success. First, we compared Mercom to a case study from Pittsburg University describing how sustainability improves a small business overall. Next, we focused on the

importance of management with readiness to address unprecedented events with interviews conducted with Mercom employees and my personal experience working in Mercom.

Pittsburg University conducted a survey saying that more than a third of consumers now say that they prefer to buy from brands that can be labeled as doing social and environmental goods. In other words, this creates more sustainable brands. Research from a 2018 study says that 70 percent of investors responding to the survey said that sustainability was central to their investment decisions^{ix}. This is not only benefiting small businesses, but the long-term effect of the world and to help reach the goal of sustainability. From a result study published in April 2015 Harvard Business Review, “The results are very consistent: firms making investments on material ESG [environmental, social, and governance] issues outperform their peers in the future in terms of risk-adjusted stock price performance, sales growth, and profitability margin growth.”^x This study concludes that the more sustainable the firm is the more likely the firm succeeds, specifically in small business. Georgetown County small businesses, like many throughout the US, have been affected by COVID-19. This allows for remote work and provides a layer of sustainability for small businesses.

The graph below is data from the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce: Community Profile^{xi}. The graph shows the annual unemployment rate Georgetown County experienced. There was a high increase in unemployment in March 2020 when COVID 19 began. This was one of the impacts that Georgetown County experienced during the pandemic^{xii}.

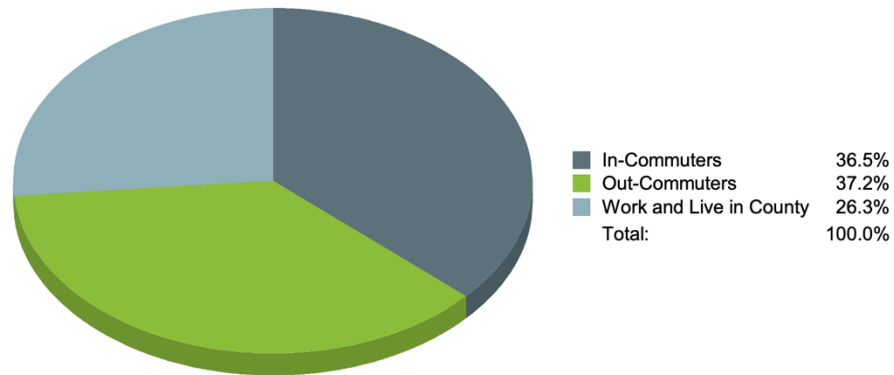
Annual Unemployment Rate (Unadjusted)



xiii

This report also included the ‘Top 10 Places Residents Are Commuting From’ and Georgetown County nine on the list, with a total of 34 works that commute to work.^{xiv} The graph below shows the commuting patterns in Georgetown County, out-commuters overtake the in-commuters by 37.2%^{xv}. The amount of commuting that could be changed to remote work will have a substantial effect economical and globally to the environment^{xvi}. Remote work in Georgetown County will potentially bring in more people to live in Georgetown County since they will have a job secured at home.

Commuting Patterns



Commuting Patterns	Workers
Work and Live in County	16,067
In-Commuters	22,341
Out-Commuters	22,722

Source: U.S. Census Bureau - 2010

xvii

Background on Mercom is principal to understanding how Mercom functions. Mercom has roughly 9-12 employees working directly from digital devices to operate. The majority of communication with clients comes from emails/phone calls^{xviii} I conducted an interview with a Mercom employee about how Mercom handled COVID-19 and how they examined what actions were best for Mercom to be successful. Jimmy Coggin, the Vice President of Operations in Mercom said that Mercom’s goal was first to keep everyone safe during the pandemic. Mr. Coggin said that he believes Mercom was prepared for remote work. They often worked remotely during hurricane evacuations, typically ranging from one to two weeks. Hurricane evacuations compelled Mercom to migrate all the servers/hardware to the cloud.^{xix}

This helped with the risk and contingency planning, which all businesses should utilize to be more successful. This helped not needing to go to the office and made working remotely

easier. Mr. Coggin mentioned that they had a technology refresh, where every two to three years new computers, phones, systems, etc. got updated, which allowed Mercom to work more efficiently with up to-date technology. When asked about employee productivity, Mr. Coggin commented that the employees productively level was even better than working in the office. Mercom values its employees and fosters a positive team environment. Everyone has an outstanding work ethic and that is a huge contribution to Mercom's success. Communicating well and often is very important, especially while working remotely^{xx}.

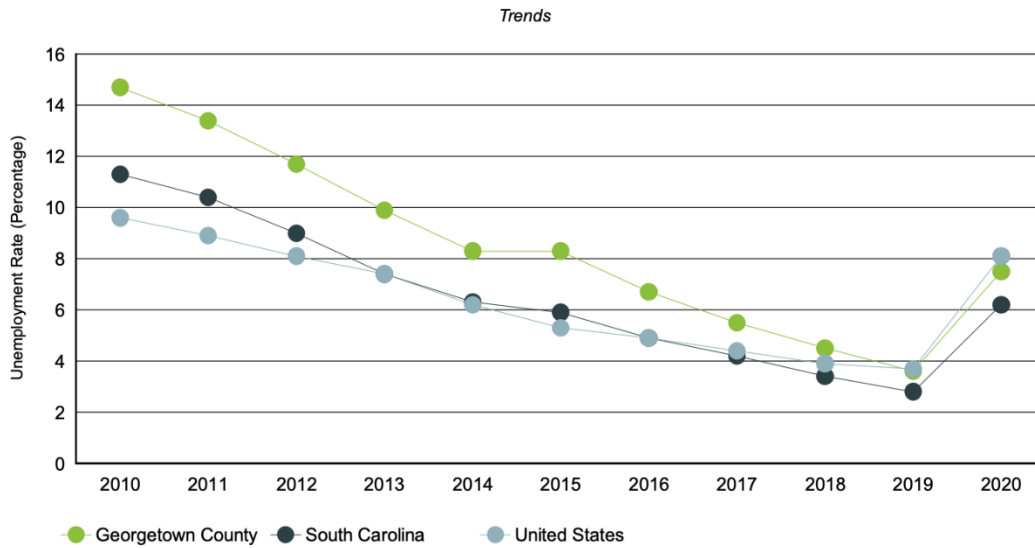
During interning at Mercom Corporation: my observations of Mercom was very admiration with how they communicated and handled working remotely. Everyone has an extraordinary work ethic and will always try to help anyone who needs assistance. I agree with Mr. Coggin that the key to working remotely relies on employees. I believe it is also reflected on Mercom's success: being prepared and planning for the unprecedent shows amazing adaptability. Mercom holds an employee meeting in the beginning of every week to plan and update the group on each employee's progress. This meeting prioritizes every employee and promotes communication effectively. Mercom created a schedule similar to when they would work in the office, the same 8am-5pm schedule and maintained the same work hours. Observing Mercom's structure and operations requires productive employees and requires proper communication in order to provide innovative solutions to clients. Working at Mercom highlighted their extraordinary customer service and quick replies to all employees and clients. Communication was easy and necessary to maintain productivity, resulting in success. These qualities reflect best practices for companies that work remotely.

Sustainable Development Goals Analysis and Conclusion:

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) have an ultimate goal of achieving peace and prosperity for people and the planet. SDG goals can be and should be also local goals. Focusing on Goal 8, Economic Growth, Georgetown County can benefit by changing how they work. Whether that be in office or remotely, success is based on how each small business creates a plan specifically for their small business. During the pandemic, over 1.6 billion workers working in tourism were affected. Tourism is a leading revenue for Georgetown County, causing many challenges during this time¹. Goal 8 promotes “full and productive employment” for small businesses to be successful there needs to be policy and planning for unexpected events. Having Georgetown County promote contingency planning and having a budget set aside for unprecedented events will promote SDG goal eight. The graph below comes from the South Carolina Department of Employment and Work Force. The graph compares the annual unemployment rate in Georgetown County, South Carolina, and the United States. The graph depicts a steady decrease on unemployment from years 2010-2019, however when year 2020 hits the unemployment increased drastically^{xxi}. Goal 8 targets promoting sustained and inclusive economic growth, this graph depicts how many Georgetown County residents went unemployment due to the pandemic. If remote work was an option, there is a huge possibility that the unemployment rates would describes: it would allow citizens to work safely and securely from their home^{xxii}. This would have a huge impact globally, by increasing economic growth this allows less unemployment and more employees^{xxiii}.

¹ SDG GOAL 8 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>

Annual Unemployment Rate (Unadjusted)



xxiv

Goal 9, which promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation, is exactly what Mercom does for the Federal Government. Innovation is key to learning and educating for Georgetown County to develop. Mercom impacts globally not only by spreading innovation by reducing greenhouse fuel emissions by not driving to work daily. Goal eleven, focuses on making cities and humans have inclusive, safe, and sustainable settlements. Mercom embodies Goal Eleven by operating remotely, this allowed all employees to work regardless of health condition because working remotely makes it safer for all^{xxv}. Mercom's organization impacts globally since it allows safer working conditions, therefore decreasing the spread of COVID-19.

Recommendations/Future Needs:

To help Georgetown County promote Sustainable Development Goals from the United Nations I personally recommend small businesses, if possible, to work remotely. I believe this has benefits for Georgetown County and globally. Working remotely lowered emissions since

there is less commuting and decreases the amount of paper usage companies use.^{xxvi} I recommend that Georgetown County creates a policy plan for unprecedented events. This will ensure small businesses to successfully work remotely, instead of possible unemployment. Adapting to remote work will improve inclusivity and embrace hiring people for different backgrounds, since you're not grounded to one area. Georgetown County needs to have a contingency plan for future 'pandemics', learning from past experience always creates growth. I believe Georgetown County needs to prioritize Sustainable Development Goals 8, 9, and 11 to increase economic growth and help make a global impact to meet the 2030 Goal of creating a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity^{xxvii}.

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ⁱ (“Goal 8 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs” n.d.)

ⁱⁱ (“Goal 9 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs” n.d.)

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^{iv} (Bartik et al. 2020)

^v (“Coronavirus: US States Will Reopen, but Are Americans Actually Ready?” n.d.)

^{vi} (Bartik et al. 2020)

^{vii} (Bartik et al. 2020)

^{viii} (Bartik et al. 2020)

^{ix} (Simon, n.d.)

^x (Serafeim 2015)

^{xi} (Community Profile, S.C Department of Employment and Workforce)

^{xii} (Community Profile, S.C Department of Employment and Workforce)

^{xiii} (Community Profile, S.C Department of Employment and Workforce)

^{xiv} (Community Profile, S.C Department of Employment and Workforce)

^{xv} (Community Profile, S.C Department of Employment and Workforce)

^{xvi} (“25 Key Remote Work Statistics for 2020” n.d.)

^{xvii} (Community Profile, S.C Department of Employment and Workforce)

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^{xx} (Coggin Jimmy. Interviewed by Ataalla Sandra. Mercom Interview. Remotely. April 1, 2020)

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^{xxii} (“Goal 8 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs” n.d.)

^{xxiii} (“Finding Transformative Pathways in Turbulent Times — SDG Indicators” n.d.)

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^{xxv} (“— SDG Indicators” n.d.)

^{xxvi} (Schad 2020)

^{xxvii} (“Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs” n.d.)