

## **Chapter 1**

### *Introduction*

#### **Statement of the Problem**

MissFit is a start-up pole dancing fitness company that still needs to establish a brand. It will start out as an online company featuring all things related to pole dancing and advocating for pole dancing as an art form, a sport, and a way of life. It will target female pole dancers – and females, in general – and provide a common ground for this audience in an effort to help them embrace their skill, athleticism, sexuality, and self in a positive, healthy way. Additionally, it is possible that MissFit will eventually evolve to include an affiliated studio and/or an event performance company when time and resources become available.

Pole dancing, as a recreational activity, is still fairly new to the fitness market. And although it is becoming increasingly more mainstream, much of the public is still unaware of the activity and its many physical and mental health benefits. World-wide, pole dancing is moving from nightclubs to competitions as it transitions from a sexual commodity to an athletic art-form. Still, many people can't shake the image of the pole dancing "stripper."

MissFit needs a brand identity that casts pole dancing in a positive light and reinforces its many benefits. In an effort to eliminate the negative depictions of the pole dancing "stripper," MissFit intends to promote pole dancing as an empowering activity for women that enhances fitness, health, confidence, and happiness.

## **Background of the Problem**

Pole dancing first made its debut in nightclubs where strippers would use a pole as a prop to perform exotic dance moves while also removing articles of clothing. Pole dancing outside of nightclubs was always unheard of until fairly recently. People soon discovered that it was a great work-out after realizing that it required a lot of physical strength, coordination, flexibility, and focus.

Since then, pole dancing studios have opened up all over the globe and competitions for pole dancing are held world-wide. Over the years, pole dancing, as a fitness form, has become extremely popular among females. Many women have reported significant improvements in their fitness, body image and confidence as a result of pole dancing, making them feel sexy, strong, and empowered. Even so, many people still view pole dancing as a taboo sexual activity that objectifies women.

MissFit is a pole dancing fitness company that was started to create an environment where every woman is celebrated. Offering lessons, performances, workshops and online content, MissFit represents a network of women who refuse to be stifled by social norms. Breaking free from the typical workouts and activities, pole dancing allows women to express themselves freely through the art of dance while also challenging themselves with a strenuous workout. MissFit promotes pole dancing as a sport, an art, and a way of life. They hope to help reshape the public's perception of pole dancing so that women everywhere can openly embrace it as a skill that helps them achieve the physical, mental, and spiritual growth they desire.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to figure out how to strategically brand MissFit so that its key messages are communicated effectively. The stigma attached to pole dancing inhibits many women from participating in it for recreational purposes. That is why it's important to carefully create a brand that denotes that stigma and, instead, encourages women to try pole dancing or embrace their skill (if they already do it). This study should provide valuable insight for how to convey the proper message utilizing strategic branding.

## **Setting for the Study**

This study will take place at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo as a senior project. Data will be collected from online surveys to reveal the attitudes, feelings, and beliefs of the target market. This data will then be compiled and analyzed to create a strategic plan in a branding campaign for MissFit Dance.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions were developed to guide the study toward finding a solution to the stated problem. They were designed to help conduct research both thoroughly and effectively.

1. How does the general public currently view pole dancing?
2. How can we attempt to change or alter the public's perception of pole dancing as a form of fitness?
3. What messages do we want to convey about pole dancing to the public?

4. Who should we be targeting in our efforts to brand and promote a pole dancing fitness company?
5. How can we effectively target those audiences in the branding and promotion of a pole fitness company?
6. How can we brand a pole dancing company in order to convey our key messages to the target audiences?
7. What channels can we use to properly brand and promote a pole fitness company?
8. What kinds of words, colors, fonts, etc. should be used in the branding in order to effectively convey they key messages to the target audience?

### **Definition of Terms**

Branding – The marketing practice of creating a name, symbol, or design that identifies and differentiates a product from other products (Entrepreneur)

Pole Dancing – A form of performance art, traditionally associated with strip clubs, which combines dance and acrobatics centered around a vertical pole (Wikipedia, 2013)

– A sensual form of exotic dancing which is performed around a fixed vertical pole. Pole dancing is a legitimate form of exercise and can be used for aerobic and anaerobic workouts (Medical disctionary, 2012)

Pole Fitness – A program of exercise centered around a gymnastics performed on a pole (Wikipedia, 2013)

Aerial Arts – Artistic and acrobatic movement performed on some sort of apparatus attached to a ceiling, ex: aerial hoop, trapeze, aerial silks, corde lisse (Simply Circus, Inc.)

Target Market/ Audience – A specific group of consumers at which a company aims its products and services

Key Messages – The core messages that an entity wants its target audiences to hear and remember. They create meaning and headline the issue. (Pollard, 2007)

Strategic Planning – A systematic process of envisioning a desired future, and translating this vision into broadly defined goals or objectives and a sequence of steps to achieve them (Business Dictionary)

### **Organization of the Study**

The first chapter of this study serves as an introduction, stating the problem and reasons for conducting this study. It also lays out a series of questions that must be answered throughout the course of the study. The second chapter is an extensive literature review presenting research that has already been conducted on the topic. It exposes questions and research on the topic that have not yet been covered. Chapter three is a methodology, listing the methods for performing this study. The fourth chapter analyzes the resulting data received from the study. It discusses the findings and outcomes of the study. Finally, the fifth chapter is a discussion and summary of the study. This is the chapter in which conclusions are drawn based on the outcomes of the study.

## **Chapter 2**

### *Literature Review*

#### ***Introduction***

In order to begin branding a pole dancing company such as MissFit Dance, it is important to know what similar companies and branding techniques already exist. MissFit is a start-up online company that still needs to establish its brand. It will start out as an online blog and multimedia platform featuring all things pertaining to pole dancing and advocating for pole dancing as an art form, a sport, and a way of life. It will target female pole dancers and provide a common ground for this audience in an effort to help them embrace their skill, athleticism, sexuality, and self in a positive, healthy way. Additionally, it is possible that MissFit will eventually evolve to include an affiliated studio and/or an event performance sector when time and resources become available.

Extensive research of the industry and market has provided insight into the many elements that lack coverage amongst existing publications. Overall, there seems to be very few online pole dancing websites that feature information centered around pole dancing and the industry. Compared to other activities or fitness forms, very little information about pole dancing is even available at all. Most of the sites that you find online are studio websites and personal blogs, with the exception of a few unprofessional online magazines and aggregator sites that feature other people's blogs about pole dancing.

Many amateur and professional pole dancers are branding themselves on their own websites or social media sites through which they showcase their own videos and pictures of

lessons, tricks, and performances. However, very few actually provide informative content centered around the world of pole dancing in general. A lot of the professional performers and studios have their own blogs, but most are inconsistent, neglected or irrelevant. Most aren't even written by the performers, themselves.

As far as branding goes, most of the companies similar to MissFit are branded to appeal to women, using feminine wording, girly colors (a lot of pink), and cursive or other curly styles of typeface. A lot of the online news and informative pole dancing sites are branded inconsistently or ineffectively, using colors and fonts that don't coordinate or design elements that violate design rules such as unity and rhythm, making them look unprofessional. Most pole dancing companies do have a strong mission, though, usually pertaining to the empowerment of women through the art and athleticism of pole dancing.

While researching how to effectively brand or market a company, there were a lot of helpful articles that mentioned how important it is to have strong values and a powerful mission attached to your company's brand. In one article, the author mentions how you should brand a pole dancing company in a way that focuses on emotional value in order to sell the "feeling" that pole dancing gives you. Apparently, this helps distract the public from the negative stigma attached to pole dancing. Another article describes effective ways to market pole dancing companies, highlighting techniques such as targeting college students.

Very little research has been done on the public's past, current, and changing perceptions of pole dancing. I would like to know how the general public really views it, how women view it, and how men view it. This seems self explanatory based off of general observation. However, humans tend to conform out of fear of being ostracized. So while one person may say that its

disgraceful or inappropriate, it's possible that they may actually be dying to try it themselves but are too afraid to admit it. There was, however, one study I found about the reinvention of pole dancing as a recreational activity as a result of its effect on women's self-esteem; making them feel empowered rather than objectified, contrary to typical beliefs.

### ***Similar Companies: What's out there?***

#### **JAGGED: A Contemporary Pole Dancing Company**

JAGGED is made up of a team of performers whose goal is to advocate for pole dancing as a healthy, beautiful form of fitness. They travel the world to spread awareness about the transformation of pole dancing into the mainstream world. They are also in the process of opening their own studio, where they will teach lessons and hold events. Their goals and mission are similar to those desired for MissFit, however, they do not provide informative content about about pole dancing (news, trends, products, tutorials, etc.) as MissFit would.

#### **Pole Dancing Bloggers Association (PDBA)**

The Pole Dancing Bloggers Association is an aggregator site that features all different pole dance blogs out there. This company is a really clean, professional site that's very effective because it serves as a one-stop shop, if you will, for all the fun things you want to read about if you're a pole dancer. It highlights weekly fan photos, superb blog posts from other blogs, and videos/tutorials from other pole dancers' sites. This is a great example of what MissFit should be like, other than the fact that this site doesn't have a personal element. MissFit will have one person



(me) writing its content and, in a way, will be my own brand. However, I do plan on getting readers and fans involved by featuring fan photos, videos, etc.

### **Michelle Shimmy's Blog**

Michelle Shimmy is a professional pole dancer and studio owner in Australia. Her blog is one of the best I've seen strictly because of the type of content she posts. Every post showcases her hilarious personality as well as issues and topics every pole dancer relates to. Her blog posts are both entertaining and informative so you can literally read for hours. The only problem with her blog is it lacks the multimedia element as well as effective design. All of her posts have too much text, not enough visuals. MissFit will use all kinds of alternative story-telling forms to help engage readers.

### **Pole Dance Magazine Online and Pole 2 Pole Magazine**

These are the only two online magazines for pole dancing news. They are poorly designed and therefore look very unprofessional. The content lacks newsworthiness, consistency, and quality. Articles are poorly written, unorganized, and aren't published regularly.

### ***Branding for Pole Dancing***

#### **"4 Marketing and Advertising Techniques to Get More Pole Dancing Clients"**

This article covers ways in which you can market your pole dancing business to get more clients. It's referring more to studios, but the advice is still helpful as it mentions tactics like marketing to college students, partnering with yoga studios, and focusing on the fitness benefits in advertising

so people don't get scared away by its reputation. However, this article doesn't specifically focus on branding a pole dancing company. Marketing and branding do go hand-in-hand, but I want to find out how to effectively brand a company like MissFit to get the best possible response from the general and pole dancing publics (Jones, 2013).

### **“How to Market Pole Dancing...Yes, Pole Dancing”**

This article discusses how it is important to sell a “feeling” when marketing pole dancing rather than selling the pole, itself. This is useful information. However, the rest of the article is irrelevant and omits any other factors that may contribute to successful branding and marketing of a pole dancing company (Cheng, 2008).

### **“Pole Dancing: A New Approach to Fitness – Why Athletes are Going Vertical”**

This Livestrong.com article on why athletes are getting into pole dancing focuses on the “why.” Being able to determine why someone would want to get into pole fitness helps in the branding of MissFit because those attributes will likely sell the idea. It would be interesting to get a survey response from our target markets about *why* they participate in the fitness activities they participate in. Using their responses, I can then shape the mission, key messages, and company descriptions based off of what they say (Grunder, 2012).

### **“3 Ingredients to Building a Digital Brand From Scratch”**

This article about branding a digital company gives really great tips based off previous case studies of digital brands. It is quite brief, and does not focus specifically on pole dancing brands.

It is relevant to the MissFit online brand though, and many of the tactics can be used in the branding of the MissFit website (Cochran, 2013).

### **“SoulCycle’s Secret to Turning Customers into Die-Hard Fans”**

The Author of this article uses the company, SoulCycle as an example. SoulCycle is a dance-infused indoor cycling company. The article uses this company as a case study for analyzing how to turn a company’s customers into its advocates. It discusses strategies used by SoulCycle such as offering deals to loyal customers, practicing consistency, and ensuring your employees have pride in the company. This is very useful and relevant information, especially because it uses a fitness company as an example. Much of this article could relate to the branding of MissFit, but again, it doesn’t focus solely on branding a fitness company (Epstein, 2013).

### ***Attitudes Towards Pole Dancing and it’s Transition into the Mainstream World***

#### **“‘Empowerment’ and the Pole: a Discursive Investigation of the Reinvention of Pole Dancing as a Recreational Activity”**

This article from the Journal of Feminism and Psychology is a study of how pole dancing actually makes participants feel empowered rather than objectified, contrary to popular belief. It investigates feminine attitudes towards pole dancing as a sport rather than a sexual commodity as it moves into the mainstream fitness arena. It gives a glance into the minds of participating females, however, neglects to study the attitudes of outsiders to the pole dancing world (Whitehead, 2009).

### **LA Times: “Pole Dance as Art Form”**

This LA Times article reports how pole dancing isn't just associated with stripping anymore, but has instead become an art form. The article profiles a competitive pole dancer. This is a great resource for representing the changing attitudes towards pole dancing, but it also doesn't give much insight into how the *public* actually views pole dancing since the article is more of a feature of a pole dancer (Conley, 2013).

## **Chapter 3**

### *Methodology*

#### **Data Sources**

An online survey will be distributed in order to collect data revealing how effective or ineffective prospective branding methods are for MissFit Dance. The purpose of the survey is to receive input from the target market about their current perceptions of pole dancing and determine whether or not our branding methods have an effect on the way participants perceive pole dancing as a recreational activity. The results will also help ensure that proper messaging is communicated through various components of the brand. The survey will be hosted online by Survey Monkey, and a link to the survey will be posted on Facebook and other online platforms.

#### **Participants**

The participants in the survey will consist mainly of two different target audiences. The first will be females of all ages who already participate in pole dancing or other similar activities, like aerial arts. The second will be females ages 18-50 who do not already participate in such activities. Although these two groups are the most important participants in my study, I also want to distribute the survey to a group of men to reveal information regarding their perceptions of pole dancing as compared to females. Including men in the data collection process is important considering the overall mission of MissFit Dance: to help spread female empowerment, health, and happiness through the art/sport of pole dancing. Male perceptions could either interfere with

or contribute to this mission if, for example, females are concerned with the opinions of males. Therefore, such information could help determine how to brand MissFit Dance accordingly.

### **Survey Design**

The survey will consist of approximately 10 questions. The majority of the questions will be based on a Likert scale with a 1 through 5 rating. This rating will represent the degree to which a participant agrees or disagrees with an above statement. Each number on the Likert scale will indicate the following:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

The survey will ask for quantitative information regarding the participant's age, sex, and their affiliation or non-affiliation with pole dancing. The remaining questions will be qualitative and pertaining to their feelings toward pole dancing and MissFit as a company.

### **Data Collection**

Data will be collected after surveys have been distributed and completed on Survey Monkey. The individual responses to the survey will present clear data representing the opinions, attitudes, and beliefs of our target audiences. Any patterns, trends, and correlations will be visible in the collection of this data.

## **Data Presentation**

The collected data will be presented in the form of charts, graphs, and figures. Survey Monkey automatically generates the data into visuals that efficiently display patterns, trends, and correlations.

## **Limitations**

Time constraints are the greatest limitations in the production of this project. Senior project regulations for the Journalism department at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo require that projects be completed within a 10-week period. This leaves little time to conduct thorough research and then completely brand a company based on data collected in the research.

Also, lack of finances limit capabilities for effectively branding this company. If more money were available, a professional graphic designer and web designer could be hired to design the logos, website, and other materials to produce the most quality material.

Another limitation results in the fact that there is minimal access to a perfectly random sample of people for conducting a survey. If I had the capability of distributing the survey to a perfect random sample of the target audience I'm sure I would get a more accurate representation of that audience.

## **Delimitations**

Although I couldn't afford to pay professional designers to help in the branding process, I felt that my skills and capabilities were adequate enough to create effective designs to brand the

company. Limited time prevented me from designing a website from scratch, so I used Wix.com (a website design tool with free templates) to quickly create a website for MissFit Dance.

In order to select the most random sample of my target audience, the survey will be posted on Survey Monkey so that anyone can access it. The link to the survey will be posted and shared through Facebook as well as other industry sites. It will also be sent through email to various organizations with request to be forwarded to those organizations' affiliates.

Due to limited time and available individuals, I have decided to forego conducting a focus group which would have provided more thorough insight about people's feelings, attitudes, and beliefs towards the MissFit brand and pole dancing in general.



## **Chapter 4**

### *Data Analysis*

#### **Situational/Data Analysis**

MissFit is a start-up company that still needs to establish its brand. It will start out as an online blog and multimedia platform featuring all things pertaining to pole dancing and advocating for pole dancing as an art form, a sport, and a way of life. It will target female pole dancers and provide a common ground for this audience in an effort to help them embrace their skill, athleticism, sexuality, and self in a positive, healthy way. Additionally, it is possible that MissFit will eventually evolve to include an affiliated studio and/or an event performance company when time and resources become available.

An online survey was distributed to gain insight about the target audience. The first portion of the survey included questions pertaining to participants' age and sex, as well as their current association with pole dancing. If the participant selected, "yes" for having participated in pole dancing before, they were asked to select or state their reason for doing so. In order to figure out where the public receives their ideas and portrayals of pole dancing, we listed a number of environments and situations where pole dance is and can be depicted; including online, television, strip clubs, theatrical performances, competitions, etc. We made sure to include an "other" section where participants could specify. The second portion of the survey consisted of a Likert scale with 9 statements about pole dancing. Participants were instructed to mark the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement to get an idea of how the public perceives pole dancing. They were then shown a group of pole dancing images and asked to

mark their opinion to the same questions again (Figure 5). The purpose of this portion was to see how images of different kinds of pole dancing specifically affect people's opinions about it. Finally, the last portion of the survey was to determine how effective the sample brand components of the company were. Participants were instructed to read a portion of the company description and mission statement and view a screenshot of the website in progress which featured the MissFit logo and home page design (Figure 1). They were then given another Likert scale with a series of statements pertaining to the design and message effectiveness. The results would help determine if we were heading in the right direction in the branding process.

A strong majority of survey participants were female, although, there were a significant number male respondents too (33%). 68 percent of all respondents were between the ages of 21-29, and 24 percent were between 18-20. This could have been because I distributed the survey online through Facebook, where most of my networks are within those age ranges. The majority of respondents (80%) had never participated in pole dancing before, even though an equal amount reported that they had been exposed to it before. Those who said they had participated in pole dancing before mostly did it for fitness or for fun (30%). The top four situations in which people said they had been exposed to pole dancing were "Online" (44%), "On TV" (43%), "In a Theatrical Performance" (29%), and "At a Strip Club" (29%). The place with the rarest occurrence of exposure was "At a Competition" (3%).

Overall, based on the Likert scale statements before images were shown, people seemed to agree that pole dancing is a good workout and has many physical health benefits, but they did not agree that it was a sport. On the other hand, most respondents agreed that pole dancing is an art, but they did not have an opinion on whether it has many mental health benefits. Most

everyone agreed that pole dancing is sex/sensual (not a single person disagreed); but for the most part, they disagreed that it was obscene and/or inappropriate. They did, however lean slightly toward beliefs that it objectifies women (35% were neutral, 34% agreed that it objectifies women). Also, 80 percent of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “stripping and pole dancing are the same thing.” After showing images of different kinds of pole dancing, not much changed regarding people’s opinions about pole dancing. There was a slight shift towards people agreeing that pole dancing objectifies women. However, this portion of the survey is a bit faulty considering when I first launched the survey, I forgot to enact a setting on this question that allowed people to answer within the same column twice. In other words, for the first five minutes that the survey was public, respondents could agree or disagree with more than one of the statements. Given that this skewed my research a little bit, it’s hard to determine whether the images had a true effect on people’s opinions of pole dancing.

*(See Tables, page 36)*

After viewing the branding components of the company most everyone agreed that the prospective branding methods were appealing, cohesive, and conveyed a clear message and brand personality. Overall, respondents agreed that they had a positive view of pole dancing, and disagreed that they had a negative view of pole dancing. The majority also disagreed that they “would NOT want a close friend or family member participating in pole dancing.” This confirms to me that the prospective branding methods are, for the most part, effective.

*(See Figures, page 42)*

## **Public Relations Plan – Branding Campaign**

### ***Goals:***

- Create an effective brand identity for MissFit Dance that helps reinforce a positive image of pole dancing
- Effectively convey the company's key messages through every aspect of the brand
- Establish a cohesive brand presence across all online platforms (social media and other online platforms)
- Use design elements properly to effectively design various brand materials and platforms (i.e. the website, business cards, logo, etc.)
- Create a strong and powerful mission statement that properly conveys our desired message to our target audience
- Maintain a consistent brand and message across all elements of the organization

### ***Objectives:***

- Receive feedback from our target market that MissFit embodies the brand identity we're aiming for
- Determine whether or not the company's key messages are being conveyed correctly through various elements of the organization (measurable through surveys and possibly a focus group)
- Receive positive feedback on the unity, rhythm, and cohesiveness of the designs for the website, logo, etc. through surveys administered to our target audience

- Include the mission statement in the survey to ensure that our target audience perceives the company's mission the way we want them to perceive it

### ***Target Audiences:***

Our target audience consists of three different groups:

1. Female pole dancers of all ages who are already involved in the activity and are highly interested in the industry.
2. Pole Dancing companies including, but not limited to, product companies, competition organizations, other online pole dancing blogs, and professional performance organizations
3. Females, predominantly ages 18-30, who have, or would like to have, a healthy and active lifestyle, but are not already involved in pole dancing. They may have an interest in trying alternative forms of fitness or activities similar to pole dancing.

### ***Strategies:***

- Design a website, business card, and logo that appeal to females, particularly Generation X and Y individuals, using design elements that most effectively appeal to such audiences
- Write a mission statement using choice words that effectively convey our message in one brief sentence
- Set up social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest to establish MissFit as a brand
- Write all of the company's content and descriptions to coincide with our key messages

- Get feedback from our target audiences to see how they respond to the brand image, messages, designs, and ideas

### ***Tactics:***

#### *Design*

- Use high-contrast colors which appeal to younger generations
- Include feminine-looking typeface in the company logo
- Use colors and icons that portray a sassy, feminine, and fun vibe. We want to create an image of the brand that can be associated with how women want to feel. In other words, if MissFit was a person she would be confident, sexy, strong (mentally and physically), fit, healthy, happy, and powerful.
- Use as little words as possible in the designs, instead we want our designs to speak for us. Say everything we need to say in one design

#### *Mission Statement*

- Write down as many words as possible that exemplify the passion and driving force behind the idea of MissFit Dance, choose words very carefully
- Focus on the feeling. We want to sell an emotion rather than facts. Our audiences will be sold on the idea most likely because they can relate or resonate with a feeling they want to have, especially if they're on the fence about the idea of pole dancing.

#### *Social Media*

- Use Facebook for advertising blog posts, videos, photos, contests, etc.
- Use Instagram heavily and take advantage of hashtags as a way of establishing brand presence

- Pinterest will be a huge advertising tactic for increasing traffic to the blog and website. Photos posted on this platform must be appealing and of good quality so that it drives people to click on the photo which will lead to blog posts and articles
- Take full advantage of social media as a way of reinforcing the key messages and selling that ‘feeling’ we want our audience to relate to

### *Content*

- Limit the number of words as much as possible. Every description or piece of information should clearly send our desired message in a concise matter.
- We don’t want to use tons of text that people have to spend more than 2-3 minutes reading through, since this is an online company.
- Implement tactics for effective online reading (i.e. short paragraphs, organized points, bullets, bold meaningful headlines, ‘F’ Pattern,’ etc.)

## Chapter 5

### *Discussion and Recommendations*

#### **Summary**

As a start-up pole dancing fitness company MissFit was in desperate need of a brand identity. However, the current perceptions and views of pole dancing amongst the public often turn potential customers away from trying pole dancing as a recreational activity. Due to the history behind pole dancing, many people are apprehensive about participating in it because they fear being stigmatized. Pole dancing originated in strip clubs, where it has been portrayed as a sexual commodity since the fifties. And although it has made its way into the mainstream fitness world, many people still refuse to accept it as a legitimate sport and art form. MissFit was created with a goal to help remove the negative stigma and raise awareness about all the benefits pole dancing has to offer. The company's overall goal was to help empower women through pole dancing and give them the freedom to embrace it as a skill without fear of scrutiny.

This study was designed to use market research to determine the most effective method for strategically branding MissFit in a way that helps reshape the public's perception of pole dancing. Research conducted among second-hand publications helped lay the ground-work for a qualitative study that would reveal insight into MissFit's target market. By analyzing the resulting data, a PR plan could be made to strategize branding methods. Proper messaging was the most important part of this branding process. It was crucial that the designs, content, and overall personality of the brand conveyed the correct message about pole dancing. After all, MissFit's underlying values aim to help reshape public perceptions. However, portraying the



feminine and sexy side of pole dancing was equally important, because many women love pole dancing for those reasons more than others (Shimmy's Pole Diaries). The end result was the development of a brand that exudes femininity and sass. Focusing on individuality, the personality of the brand magnifies the meaning behind the name MissFit. All aspects of the brand represent a figurative and symbolic character; a woman who refuses to be stifled by the expectations of society and, instead, chooses to make her own rules and embrace her individuality, for she IS beautiful, happy, and powerful.

## **Discussion**

Results of a survey that was distributed online through social media and email showed insightful evidence about the public's attitude, beliefs, and opinions. It revealed that most people actually view pole dancing in an overall positive way, as they agreed that it is a great work out and a legitimate art-form. However, most people do not consider pole dancing a sport. Interestingly, most people have been exposed to pole dancing on TV, online, in strip clubs, or in theatrical performances, more than anywhere else. However, competitions (which are the most crucial part of the pole dancing world), were the rarest places that people had been exposed to pole dancing. One can infer from these results that the reason most people didn't agree that pole dancing was a sport is because they have never seen it in competitions. Also, a fair amount of people said that they believe pole dancing objectifies women. Nevertheless, the survey revealed that branding methods used were effective and conveyed the proper messages. Many people agreed that they were interested in learning more about MissFit and that they would personally like to try pole

dancing after viewing an image of the company's website and reading the company description and mission statement.

Using the information received from the survey, the branding of MissFit could finally be completed. While MissFit thought it was important to highlight the athletic qualities of pole dancing, our survey also revealed that most everyone agrees that pole dancing is sexy. Yet, the majority still have an overall positive view of pole dancing (Table 5). Not only that, most women who participate in pole dancing love the activity because it is sensual and makes them feel sexy and more confident. This value is important to MissFit since their overall mission is to help women feel empowered, beautiful, and happy. And if that means feeling sexy, then they have a right to embrace that. With that in mind we wanted to portray a feminine and sassy quality through the designs. The logo features a youthful brush script font that resembles lipstick drawn on a mirror to depict youth, femininity, and rebelliousness – literally and figuratively spelling out “MissFit.” The font is white and set against a black background. The choice in contrasting colors was purposeful, as studies show that younger age groups respond to more contrast. It's also eye-catching. A pair of red kiss-mark lips are placed in the upper-right corner next to the ‘t’ of ‘MissFit.’ Underneath the company name reads “pole dancing fitness” in a sans-serif thin font (Figure 2).

The website features the MissFit logo in the top-left, a black background, and white lettering. Hints of red are displayed in lines and rollover features throughout the website to display unity between the logo and the rest of the site. In the top right is an all white silhouette of a pole dancer. She is wearing heels and is doing an acrobatic pose on the pole. I was conflicted over whether the image of the pole dancer gave the brand too much of a “stripper” vibe.

However, I felt that she summed up the brand's character and personality in one glance, and that's too powerful to ignore. To compensate for this, The slider image on the home page of the site features a pole dancer who is bare-foot, in more athletic-looking clothing, doing an extremely difficult move that obviously requires immense strength, flexibility, coordination, and skill. I felt it was important to depict different sides of pole dancing because there are many different purposes that pole dancing serves. For some, it's dance; for others, it's gymnastics, or an expression of sexuality, or just plain strength exercise. MissFit wants to emphasize that pole dancing can be anything you want and need it to be (Figure 1).

The mission statement and "About MissFit" were carefully crafted with choice words that emulate the company's underlying values, beliefs, and motives. But most importantly, the words reflect emotion that the target market can relate to. The mission statement purposefully paints a picture of what every woman wants for themselves. When writing the mission statement, I wanted the reader to see a reflection of themselves while reading it. The more a target audience can relate with what a company is saying, the more likely they are to develop positive feelings toward that company. This was evidently successful since the majority of the survey respondents said that they have an overall positive view of pole dancing after reading the information. Rather than focusing on the technicalities and straight facts, I made sure to also evoke emotion through the company description. The mission statement and company description are as follows:

### ***MissFit***

***Every woman is unique; different in size, shape, background and spirit. She may not fit into the molds of society. Then again, why should she? Her mind, body, and heart are unlike any other. She is destined for her own goals, passions and experiences. She doesn't fit in because she was born to stand out. She makes her own rules. She is her own woman, a "MissFit" – beautiful, happy, and powerful in her own right.***

### ***Who We Are***

*We are a pole dancing fitness company that exists to create an environment where every woman is celebrated. Offering lessons, performances, workshops and online content, MissFit represents a network of women who refuse to be stifled by social norms. Breaking free from the typical workouts and activities that bore us, we embrace pole dancing as a sport, an art, and a way of life.*

*As an alternative form of fitness, pole dancing allows women to express themselves freely through the art of dance while also challenging themselves with a strenuous workout. Those who participate in pole dancing often report overall improvements in their mental and physical health, including significant weight loss, improved confidence and self-esteem, and increased coordination.*

*However, its roots as an exotic dance form that originated in strip clubs prevent many people from accepting pole dancing as a legitimate art form and athletic activity. We hope to help reshape the public's perception of pole dancing so that women everywhere can openly embrace it as a skill that helps them achieve the physical, mental, and spiritual growth they desire.*

#### ***Our Mission:***

*To empower every woman by giving her the freedom to express her individuality through movement that serves her. By advocating for pole dancing as a legitimate art form and athletic activity, we hope to help reshape the public's perception of pole dancing so that women can openly embrace it as a skill.*

## **Conclusion**

Branding a company is a difficult process, especially when that company is a start-up. When there is such little information and awareness of a company, crafting a brand from scratch is risky business. However, crafting a brand from scratch for a start-up pole dancing company is even riskier business. After all, in this situation you're creating a brand for a cause that already has so many negative and skewed ideas associated with it. That's why it is important to conduct careful market research before any final decisions are made in the branding of any company.

Thorough market research led to conclusions about MissFit's target market. Insight into their

attitudes, behavior, and beliefs helped narrow down design decisions and methodically create a brand identity with effective messaging and an iconic identity.

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TABLES

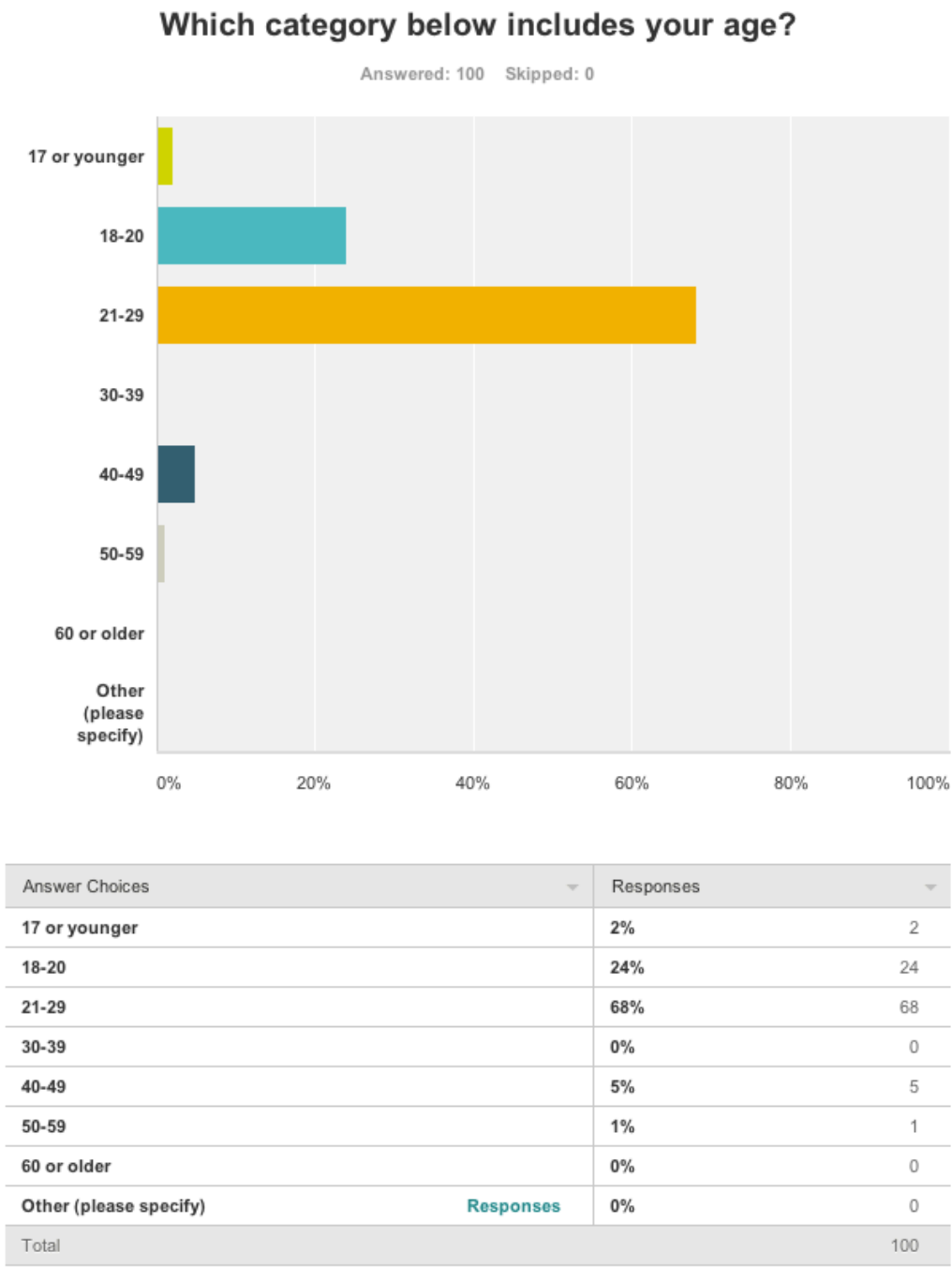
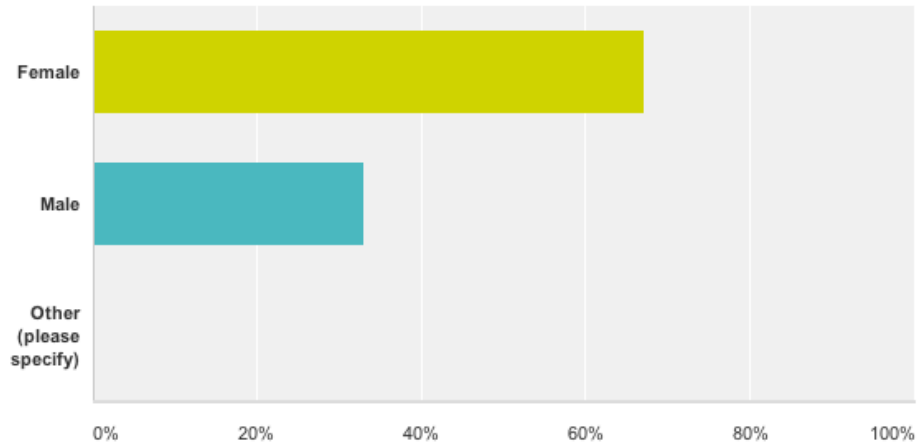


Table 1: Age Survey Question

### What is your gender?

Answered: 100 Skipped: 0

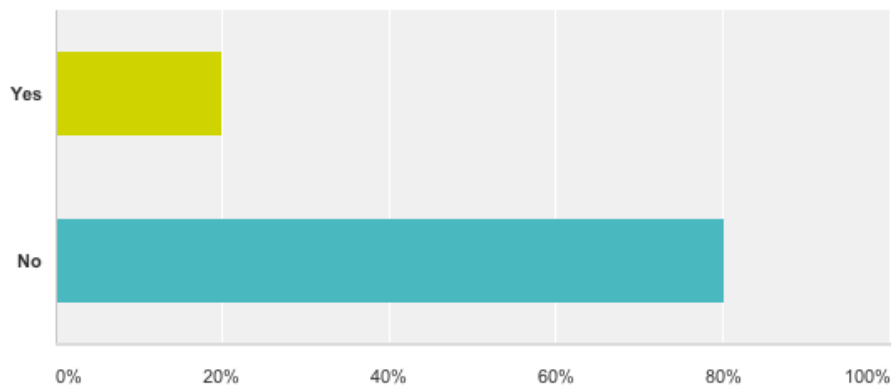


| Answer Choices         | Responses |    |
|------------------------|-----------|----|
| Female                 | 67%       | 67 |
| Male                   | 33%       | 33 |
| Other (please specify) | 0%        | 0  |
| Total                  | 100       |    |

Table 2: Gender Survey Question

### Have you ever participated in pole dancing and/or other aerial arts (hoop, silks, etc.) as a recreational activity?

Answered: 100 Skipped: 0

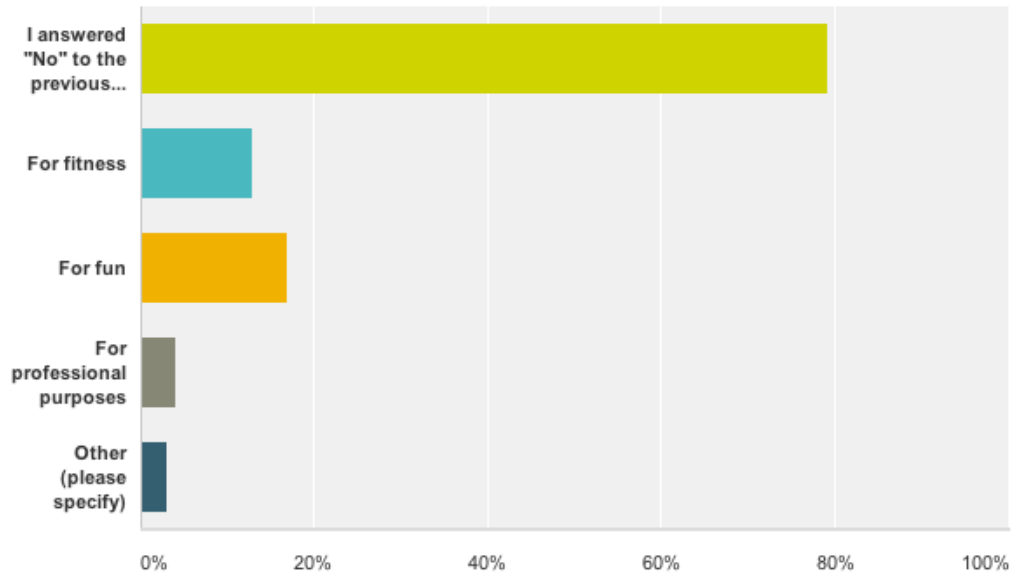


| Answer Choices | Responses |    |
|----------------|-----------|----|
| Yes            | 20%       | 20 |
| No             | 80%       | 80 |
| Total          | 100       |    |

Table 3: Pole Dancing Participation Survey Question

**If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, which of the following best describes your reason for participating in it? Select all that apply.**

Answered: 100 Skipped: 0

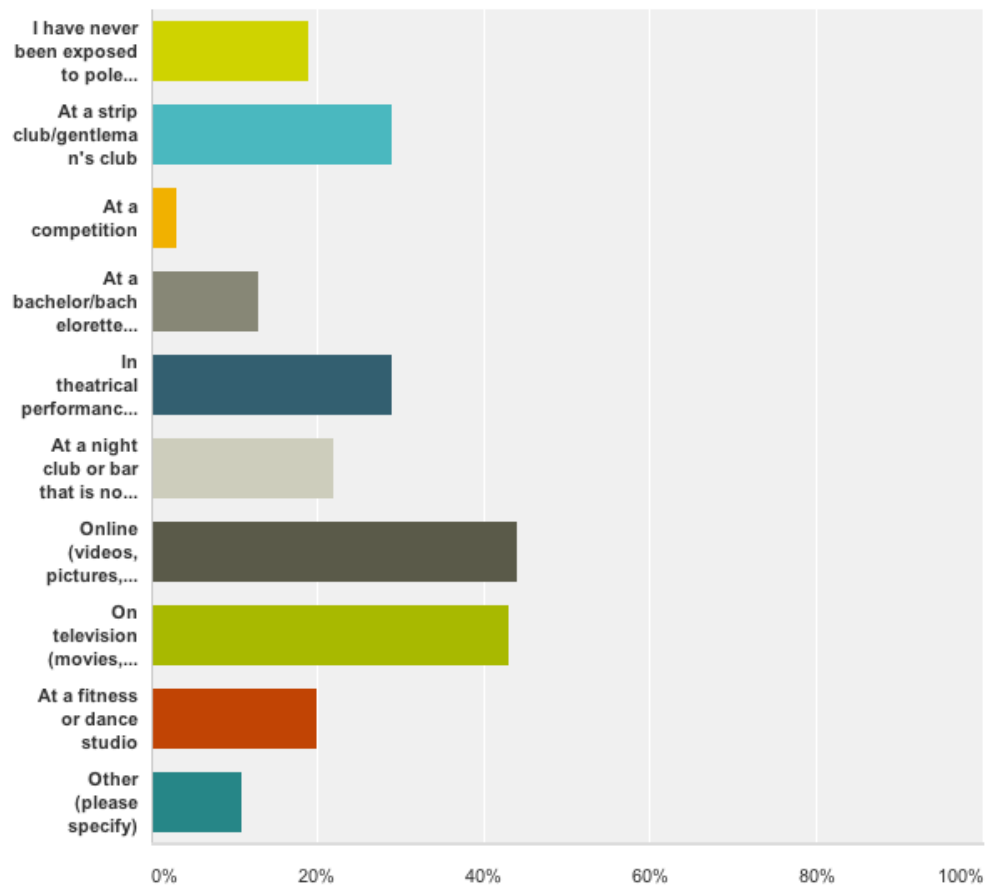


| Answer Choices                           | Responses |    |
|--|-----------|----|
| I answered "No" to the previous question | 79%       | 79 |
| For fitness                              | 13%       | 13 |
| For fun                                  | 17%       | 17 |
| For professional purposes                | 4%        | 4  |
| Other (please specify)                   | 3%        | 3  |
| Total Respondents: 100                   |           |    |

*Table 4: Reasons for Pole Dancing Survey Question*

# Have you ever been exposed to pole dancing before? If so, how have you been exposed to it? Select all that apply.

Answered: 100 Skipped: 0



| Answer Choices  | Responses |
|---|-----------|
| I have never been exposed to pole dancing before.                           | 19% 19    |
| At a strip club/gentleman's club  | 29.00% 29 |
| At a competition  | 3% 3      |
| At a bachelor/bachelorette party  | 13% 13    |
| In theatrical performances (Cirque du Soleil, Broadway shows, etc.)         | 29.00% 29 |
| At a night club or bar that is not considered a strip club/gentleman's club | 22% 22    |
| Online (videos, pictures, etc.)   | 44% 44    |
| On television (movies, shows, etc.)   | 43% 43    |
| At a fitness or dance studio  | 20% 20    |
| Other (please specify)  | 11% 11    |
| Total Respondents: 100  |           |

Table 5: Exposure to Pole Dancing Survey Question

|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree     | Neutral      | Agree        | Strongly Agree | Total |
|--|-------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-------|
| Pole dancing objectifies women.                  | 10.34%<br>9       | 17.24%<br>15 | 24.14%<br>21 | 39.08%<br>34 | 9.20%<br>8     | 87    |
| Pole dancing is a good workout.                  | 2.30%<br>2        | 5.75%<br>5   | 3.45%<br>3   | 48.28%<br>42 | 40.23%<br>35   | 87    |
| Pole dancing and "stripping" are the same thing. | 27.27%<br>24      | 50%<br>44    | 14.77%<br>13 | 4.55%<br>4   | 3.41%<br>3     | 88    |
| Pole dancing has many physical health benefits.  | 1.18%<br>1        | 4.71%<br>4   | 11.76%<br>10 | 52.94%<br>45 | 29.41%<br>25   | 85    |
| Pole dancing has many mental health benefits.    | 5.81%<br>5        | 10.47%<br>9  | 40.70%<br>35 | 27.91%<br>24 | 15.12%<br>13   | 86    |
| Pole dancing is obscene and/or inappropriate.    | 17.65%<br>15      | 36.47%<br>31 | 25.88%<br>22 | 16.47%<br>14 | 3.53%<br>3     | 85    |
| Pole dancing is a sport.                         | 12.79%<br>11      | 32.56%<br>28 | 25.58%<br>22 | 15.12%<br>13 | 13.95%<br>12   | 86    |
| Pole dancing is an art.                          | 2.35%<br>2        | 3.53%<br>3   | 14.12%<br>12 | 55.29%<br>47 | 24.71%<br>21   | 85    |
| Pole dancing is sexy and/or sensual.             | 0%<br>0           | 1.19%<br>1   | 4.76%<br>4   | 55.95%<br>47 | 38.10%<br>32   | 84    |

Table 6: Likert Scale Perceptions of Pole Dancing (before images)

|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree     | Neutral      | Agree        | Strongly Agree | Total |
|--|-------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-------|
| Pole dancing objectifies women.                  | 10.34%<br>9       | 17.24%<br>15 | 24.14%<br>21 | 39.08%<br>34 | 9.20%<br>8     | 87    |
| Pole dancing is a good workout.                  | 2.30%<br>2        | 5.75%<br>5   | 3.45%<br>3   | 48.28%<br>42 | 40.23%<br>35   | 87    |
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| Pole dancing has many mental health benefits.    | 5.81%<br>5        | 10.47%<br>9  | 40.70%<br>35 | 27.91%<br>24 | 15.12%<br>13   | 86    |
| Pole dancing is obscene and/or inappropriate.    | 17.65%<br>15      | 36.47%<br>31 | 25.88%<br>22 | 16.47%<br>14 | 3.53%<br>3     | 85    |
| Pole dancing is a sport.                         | 12.79%<br>11      | 32.56%<br>28 | 25.58%<br>22 | 15.12%<br>13 | 13.95%<br>12   | 86    |
| Pole dancing is an art.                          | 2.35%<br>2        | 3.53%<br>3   | 14.12%<br>12 | 55.29%<br>47 | 24.71%<br>21   | 85    |
| Pole dancing is sexy and/or sensual.             | 0%<br>0           | 1.19%<br>1   | 4.76%<br>4   | 55.95%<br>47 | 38.10%<br>32   | 84    |

Table 7: Likert Scale Perceptions of Pole Dancing (after images)



|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree     | Neutral      | Agree        | Strongly Agree | Total |
|--|-------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-------|
| I would be interested in learning more about this company.                                     | 7.23%<br>6        | 24.10%<br>20 | 27.71%<br>23 | 28.92%<br>24 | 12.05%<br>10   | 83    |
| I would personally be interested in trying pole dancing as a recreational activity.            | 12.05%<br>10      | 22.89%<br>19 | 19.28%<br>16 | 24.10%<br>20 | 21.69%<br>18   | 83    |
| I would NOT want a close friend or family member participating in pole dancing as an activity. | 27.71%<br>23      | 33.73%<br>28 | 19.28%<br>16 | 13.25%<br>11 | 6.02%<br>5     | 83    |
| The website design (pictured above) is visually appealing.                                     | 4.88%<br>4        | 9.76%<br>8   | 19.51%<br>16 | 45.12%<br>37 | 20.73%<br>17   | 82    |
| The above information gives a clear, and understandable description of the company.            | 2.44%<br>2        | 6.10%<br>5   | 14.63%<br>12 | 58.54%<br>48 | 18.29%<br>15   | 82    |
| The website, logo, and description of the company are cohesive (go well together).             | 1.20%<br>1        | 4.82%<br>4   | 25.30%<br>21 | 48.19%<br>40 | 20.48%<br>17   | 83    |
| The "personality" of this company's brand is clearly communicated.                             | 0%<br>0           | 4.82%<br>4   | 18.07%<br>15 | 60.24%<br>50 | 16.87%<br>14   | 83    |
| Overall, I have a negative view of pole dancing.   | 32.53%<br>27      | 37.35%<br>31 | 15.66%<br>13 | 12.05%<br>10 | 2.41%<br>2     | 83    |
| Overall, I have a positive view of pole dancing.   | 4.88%<br>4        | 9.76%<br>8   | 26.83%<br>22 | 35.37%<br>29 | 23.17%<br>19   | 82    |
| I am interested in pole dancing, in general.   | 7.23%<br>6        | 19.28%<br>16 | 30.12%<br>25 | 22.89%<br>19 | 20.48%<br>17   | 83    |

Table 8: Likert Scale Effective Branding Test

## FIGURES

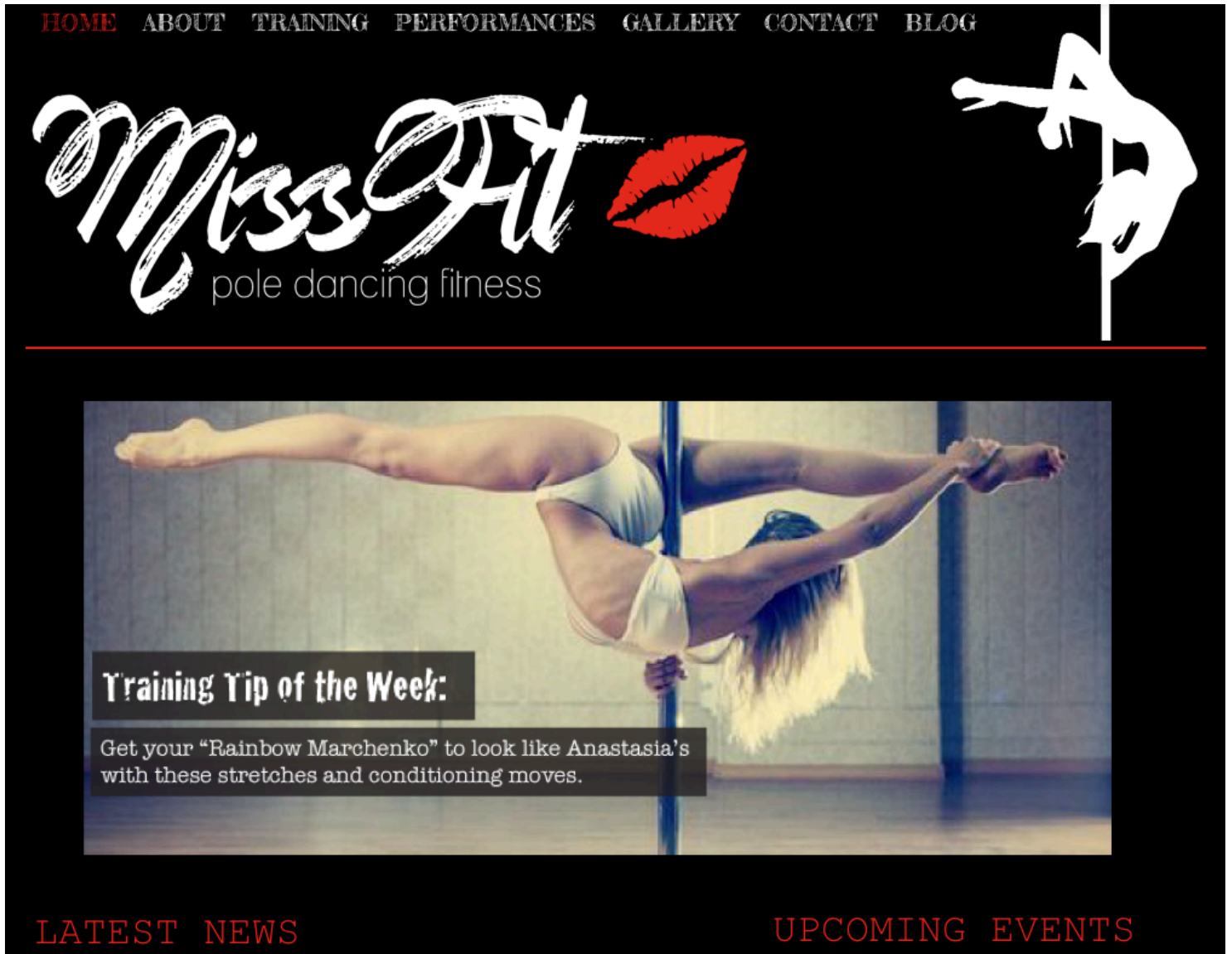


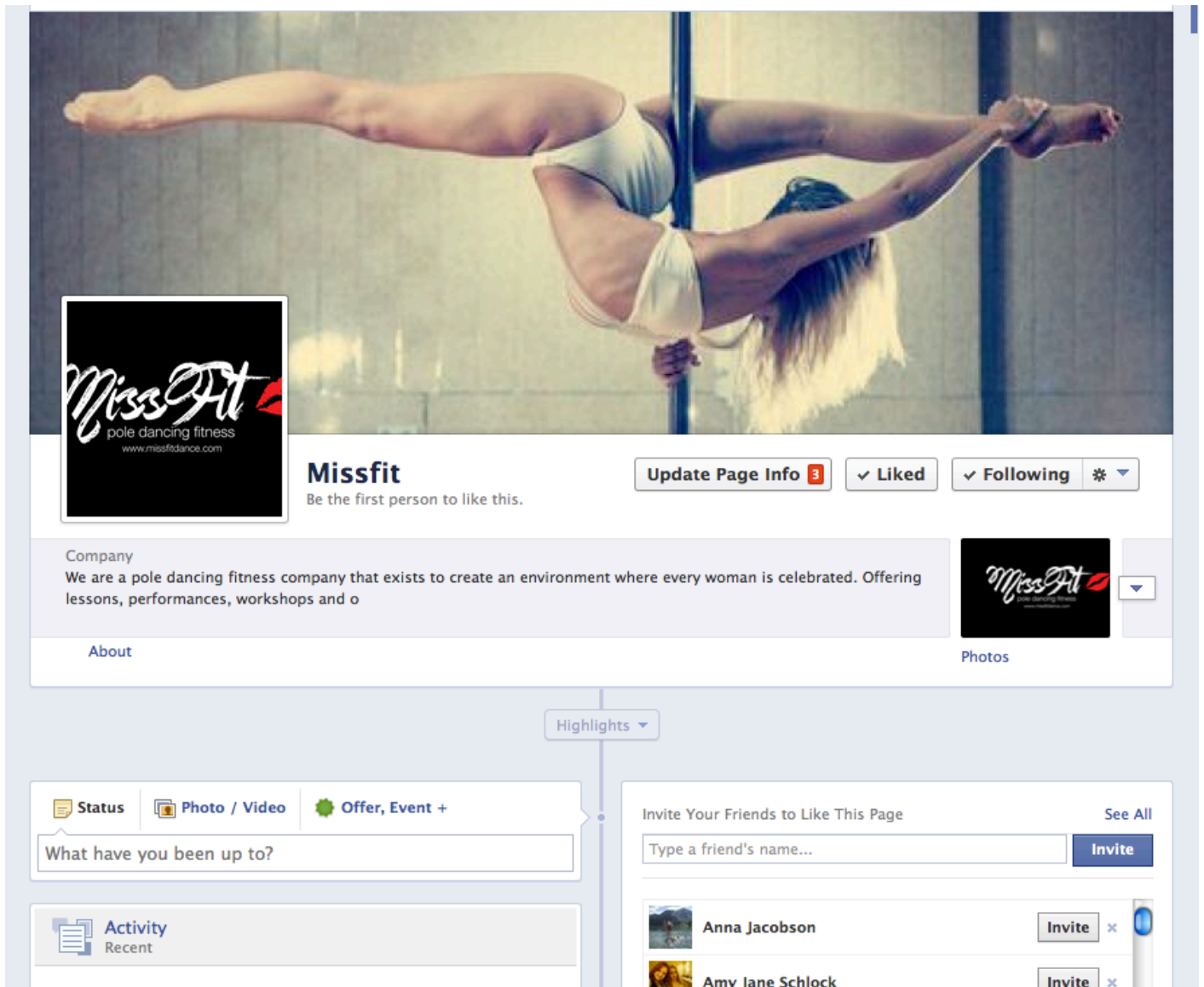
Figure 1: MissFit Website Screen Shot



*Figure 2: MissFit Logo*



*Figure 3: MissFit Business Card*



The image is a screenshot of the MissFit Facebook page. At the top is a large cover photo of a woman in a white leotard performing a pole dance move on a blue pole. Below the cover photo is the profile picture, which is a black square with the 'MissFit' logo in white script and 'pole dancing fitness' and 'www.missfitdance.com' in smaller white text. To the right of the profile picture is the page name 'Missfit' in bold, followed by the text 'Be the first person to like this.' Below this are three buttons: 'Update Page Info' with a red notification badge showing '3', 'Liked', and 'Following'. Below the buttons is a 'Company' section with the text: 'We are a pole dancing fitness company that exists to create an environment where every woman is celebrated. Offering lessons, performances, workshops and o'. To the right of the company text is a small version of the profile picture and a dropdown arrow. Below the company text are two tabs: 'About' and 'Photos'. In the center of the page is a 'Highlights' dropdown menu. On the left side, there are three tabs: 'Status', 'Photo / Video', and 'Offer, Event +'. Below these tabs is a text input field with the placeholder text 'What have you been up to?'. Below the input field is an 'Activity' section with the text 'Recent'. On the right side, there is a section titled 'Invite Your Friends to Like This Page' with a 'See All' link. Below this is a search input field with the placeholder text 'Type a friend's name...' and an 'Invite' button. Below the search field are two friend suggestions: 'Anna Jacobson' and 'Amy Jane Schlock', each with an 'Invite' button and a small blue icon.

MissFit  
pole dancing fitness  
www.missfitdance.com

**Missfit**  
Be the first person to like this.

Update Page Info 3   ✓ Liked   ✓ Following

Company  
We are a pole dancing fitness company that exists to create an environment where every woman is celebrated. Offering lessons, performances, workshops and o

About   Photos

Highlights

Status   Photo / Video   Offer, Event +

What have you been up to?

Activity  
Recent

Invite Your Friends to Like This Page   See All

Type a friend's name...   Invite

Anna Jacobson   Invite

Amy Jane Schlock   Invite

Figure 4: MissFit Facebook Page



*Figure 5: Pole Dancer Images Shown in Survey*