

THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

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NKU poll: We're going out less

Aron Levin knows exactly what you do for fun. And exactly how you like to spend your money. And how you feel about it.

Levin, associate professor of marketing at Northern Kentucky University, is a blues guitarist with the Heaters, a fixture at Coco's in Covington. He's also the hand that guides the recently completed Greater Cincinnati Entertainment Study. The four-year-old project tracks entertainment spending and found, predictably, that just since last year, fewer people are going out and spending is down.

"It's one of the tools I use to get students excited about marketing research as a career," said Levin, of Fort Thomas. "Cincinnati, with all the corporations here, is a hotbed, and that's something students need to see and participate in. I liked this project because it's the real world, it's fun for the students and it brings results that are important to the consumer because it tells them options that get positive responses."



For four years, Northern Kentucky University's Aron Levin and marketing students have surveyed entertainment habits of area residents. They are seeing less spending in the past year.

One of the survey benefits that Levin is most proud of is that it allows him to partner with five local market research firms in his Marketing Research Partnership Program, a deal that gives students still more real-world experience and, in many cases, jobs with the program's corporate partners.

"Over the past seven years, we've placed 60 students with local firms, and I think that's remarkable, especially since so many people still think of NKU as the 'new kid on the block.' Our presence in the market research community is one of many things that's changing that."

Overall, the survey, done by e-mails to about 500 people, reflects the rocky state of the economy. "Every survey includes a question on how often you go out, and those numbers show a decline in visits this year.

"That's the economy - do you pay your mortgage or do you go out? At the same time, satisfaction levels are also down, meaning people feel like they're getting less for their money. Again, I think that's a reflection of the economy. With fewer dollars to go around, you naturally expect more in return. Right now it's too early to say, but I'm hoping this downturn isn't a trend. We'll find out in future surveys.

Here are key findings in Aron Levin's Greater Cincinnati Entertainment Study:

❖ Top five attractions by popularity (attendance)

- 1.) Cincinnati Reds
- 2.) Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden
- 3.) Museum Center at Union Terminal
- 4.) Kings Island
- 5.) Events at the Aronoff Center

Levin's comment: "First and second place are a statistical tie. There's only one point between the Reds and the zoo."

❖ Top five attractions by satisfaction

- 1.) Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra
- 2.) Events at the Aronoff Center
- 3.) Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park
- 4.) Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden
- 5.) Cincinnati Art Museum

Levin's comment: "People who visit the Symphony and Aronoff know what they're getting into before they get into it. They want to be there for a specific product they're already familiar with, so of course their satisfaction level would be higher."

Levin's comment, part II: "The reason there are no sports in the 'satisfaction' area is because it's a contest, and if your team loses, you're dissatisfied."

❖ Top five attractions by value

- 1.) Cincinnati Art Museum
- 2.) Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra
- 3.) Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park
- 4.) Florence Freedom
- 5.) Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden

Levin's comment: "The Art Museum is free, so it's a great value. Florence Freedom tickets are cheap and they offer a couple hours of entertainment. The zoo's reasonably priced and it can be a full day of entertainment. In an economy like this, people recognize that."