SBDC Helps Busy Startup Entrepreneurs Launch and Brand Their New Restaurant

Long Beach business owners surpass their sales goals in just five months with help from the experts at the SBDC.

SLICED & DICED

Sliced and Diced/Peppered Up

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INDUSTRY

Food service

CHALLENGES

- Opening a new business while running an existing business
- Transitioning from a mobile business to a brick-and-mortar location
- Obtaining licenses and permits
- Marketing a new brand

SOLUTIONS

- Connecting with local resources to help smooth the startup path
- Creating a marketing plan

TRAINING

- The Ultimate Marketing Tactics for Your Business (3-day workshop)
- Affordable Care Act: What Your Business Needs to Know

CLIENT IMPACT

- 25% Increase in sales within five months

Amy Ericksen and Griselda Suarez have been cooking together for more than 10 years. Two years ago they started Peppered Up Foods, a special events, catering and artisanal food company that sells bottled sauces at local farmers' markets and events. But without their own kitchen to make the sauces, they were limited in how big they could grow the business. They also had dreams of owning a restaurant. In 2012, they decided to turn those dreams into reality and began making plans to open Sliced and Diced, a small quick-service eatery serving fresh, locally sourced foods with a "south of the border" flavor.

Challenges

Ericksen and Suarez needed advice on transitioning from a mobile business focused on farmers' markets and events to a brick-and-mortar location. They wanted guidance on obtaining necessary licenses and permits, as well as financing options and business resources available to help them start and grow Sliced and Diced. Having heard many people recommend the Small Business Development Center, in December 2012 the partners finally visited the SBDC hosted by Long Beach City College for help.

Best Advice

Through a marketing workshop series as well as one-on-one advice with SBDC Business Advisors Mike Daniel, Lynn Stewart and Sé Reed, the partners created a business plan and marketing plan, obtained licenses and permits, developed a website, opened for business and harnessed social media as a marketing tool. They also made important connections in the community that are helping them grow their new business.

SBA Funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration.

"The SBDC has given us a voice to advocate for small business in Long Beach. To have a center that's all about business is so empowering."

Griselda Suarez, Co-owner
Sliced and Diced/Peppered Up

Marketing Matters

Suarez took a three-day marketing workshop, The Ultimate Marketing Tactics for Your Business, and came out with a complete marketing plan. "This really helped with online marketing," she says. The partners already had a website for Peppered Up, but weren't happy with it. They met with Reed to talk about what they wanted the Sliced and Diced site to do. "She made suggestions and gave us specific places to go to research what kind of site we wanted. She also gave us homework on content and on visual media," Suarez says. "Then we sat down with her and decided which worked best. It was very different from the first time we did our website, when all we did was look through different [design] themes and pick what looked nice. This time we really thought about the features and how the website could work for our marketing."

The new website was up and running in less than a month. "It really explains our menu, our feel and our brand," says Suarez proudly. "I already had some knowledge of websites and WordPress, but having a consultant there to help when I was stuck was really nice."

Get Social

Peppered Up already had a strong Facebook presence—strong enough to help the partners raise $5,500 on Kickstarter to launch Sliced and Diced. At that time, the partners were also exploring Twitter and Instagram. "After the marketing workshop, I had a better understanding of how these worked and how to optimize them," says Suarez. "Now we have a strong presence not only on Facebook, but also on Twitter and Instagram. Our blog is strong too, and we're able to use that to get people to our website." Daniel also urged the partners to use Yelp! and gave them tips on how to encourage customers to post Yelp! reviews.

It Takes a Village

Knowing who to talk to at the city of Long Beach when they hit stumbling blocks related to licenses and permits was invaluable for the partners. "If we have an issue, we know we can ask Mike or one of the advisors and they'll point us in the right direction," says Ericksen. "The SBDC has also helped us get involved in local organizations that will make our restaurant even better." Suarez and Ericksen are currently working with Localism, an organization that works to connect communities by influencing consumers to buy from locally owned merchants, to develop a plan for putting in edible green space at Sliced and Diced. "It will make the space look nicer and involve the community in the restaurant," Ericksen explains.

Ericksen, who regularly attends networking events sponsored by the SBDC, says the business connections she and Suarez have made are the most valuable part of working with the SBDC: "The connections they've helped us with are immense."

It's About Time

Time is in short supply for any small business owner, and with both Suarez and Ericksen juggling full-time jobs in addition to running Peppered Up and launching Sliced and Diced, time management was of the essence. "Sé has really helped us figure out the most important places to go to get the best bang for our buck," says Ericksen. "She showed us how to utilize the tools that will help us the most in the time we have."

The SBDC also ensured the partners' didn't slack on their goals. "Sometimes you need a little kick in the pants to make sure you get things done, and [our SBDC Business Advisors] have really been that for us," says Ericksen. "They give us homework and hold us accountable."

Client Impact

During the marketing workshop, Suarez set a goal to increase the business's sales by 20 percent. Just five months later, the partners have already surpassed that goal with a 25 percent increase in sales, even though Sliced and Diced is only open four days a week. They have added an online store to their website and are using GrubHub to take online orders.

Now that they have their own restaurant kitchen where they can make their sauces in larger quantities, the partners are phasing out farmers' markets to focus on distributing their sauces through local gourmet shops. They hope to have the products in five stores soon, and have set a new goal for an additional 20 percent increase in sales. In three years, they plan to open a second, sit-down restaurant.

SBA U.S. Small Business Administration Funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration.