



SCORE column: Learn lessons from failed businesses

When talking to serial entrepreneurs, many are hesitant to talk about businesses that didn't work. Whether it's pride or a need to focus on the positive, they find it hard to admit that not every [business](#) is successful. Not Cheri Larson.

Larson, named Entrepreneur of the Year by the Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce in 2006 for her Azante Jewelry business, thinks of entrepreneurship as a journey. She is amazed at how much she's learned and doesn't regret any of it.

In creating Azante Jewelry, Larson developed a direct sales model similar to Mary Kay Cosmetics or Pampered Chef. She was looking at the big picture with independent sales representatives actively selling throughout the country.

"I really wanted to go big," Larson said. "I had aspirations of being a large [company](#)."

During the course of six years, she put together a competitive compensation program and sold business kits to independent salespeople with orders filled from the home office. She sought [help](#) from consultants.

"They all said that I was right on the mark, but needed to find some heavy-hitter sellers," she said. "I had programs and recruiting throughout the country, but had trouble finding those stronger sales reps. I learned that I could do everything right, but that wasn't enough. I never quite climbed over the mountain."

When the recession hit and sales dropped, she tried a retail location before deciding to give up the business. In the interim, as the business struggled, Larson researched, read, watched [webinars](#), and followed the latest trends in the market. She noted the increased interest in green products.

In 2008, along with Maureen [Ford](#), the pair developed EarthSAKS, a line of eco-chic reusable bags, designed to reduce the consumption of plastic bags. The line has

since expanded into other eco-friendly products like organic skin care, insect repellent and pet care items (www.green-girlsmarket.com).

Larson didn't stop there. With her husband, Ric, she started DigitalVision360, a company that offers an array of marketing tools designed to enhance the Web presence of their clients. While it seems like the businesses are all different, Larson says that marketing is the common thread.

"I started in the ad and marketing business, and over the years, I'm the one who shot the photography and did layout design and promotions," she said. "In every business, marketing is the way that you communicate who and what you are, and I have the skills to do just that."

Along the way, Larson has learned three important lessons.

"First, there is a ton of information out there, and not doing the research is the biggest mistake you can make," she said. "Second, surround yourself with people who will be honest with you, and seek out mentors. Lastly, learn how to juggle a lot of things because you have to wear so many hats. I live and die by my lists."

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