



Ask SCORE for Business Advice

Continually Fine-Tune Your Business

By Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

Maribeth Conard, owner of Conard Creative Group, knows that a downturn in the economy can affect almost every business. When people are concerned about finances, she says that it doesn't matter if the business is a gas station or grocery store, people watch what they spend in all areas of their lives. So, how has that impacted her business?

“Amazingly enough, I’m busier than I’ve ever been,” Conard says. “I think that is because what I do is offer a way for businesses to reach out to customers, attract attention, develop relationships with them. That is important anytime, but especially so during economic downturns.”

Conard knows her business, and has spent time working on her business plan. Her attitude is not one of resignation; it is upbeat. She offers custom graphic design, both print and web, and makes it unique to each client. In fact, rather than cutting down on design expenses because of the economy, she thinks that businesses need her services more than ever.

“I’m able to serve a sector of the business community that needs the type of design work that I do, but also needs the knowledge behind the design – what makes the different aspects of a design work together, what creates the look and feel necessary to communicate the message, the formal aspects of design,” Conard explained.

As her business evolves, she turns and fine-tunes her services. She has worked with SCORE, holds a fine arts degree from UW-Green Bay, and is a graduate of Leadership Green Bay. She serves as voluntary chair of the Green Bay Plan Commission where she shares her passion for planning and design. She took the Urban Hope entrepreneurial course, and meets with other alumni on a regular basis to share best business practices. And, most recently, after working with Urban Hope to rewrite her business plan, moved into the business incubator at the Business Assistance Center at NWTC-Green Bay.

Conard notes, “Here (at the Business Assistance Center) I am able to work among other small and growing businesses, and gain energy just from being in the environment.” She also credits the Urban Hope Links Leadership Group with providing the opportunity to talk to other business owners to share common experiences and get new ideas.

“My ego would like to say that I’m brilliant and come up with all of the new ideas on my own, but in reality I’m more like a member of the rest of the human race and am inspired by everyone else,” she said. The inspiration has led her to expand the services offered by her business by forming alliances with marketing professionals, photographers, programmers, and copywriters. This allows her to offer full marketing services at competitive costs. It is this awareness of her business and client needs that has made her successful. She recommends that business owners who are feeling the downturn make a similar effort.

“Reassess what you are offering and possibly change what you are offering. Look at areas you can strengthen, and reaffirm what your business is and the direction you want to go. Get assistance through the services here at the Business Assistance Center, with career counselors, or on your own. And once you have your direction, market, market, market,” Conard advised.

Finally, Conard recommends looking at the big picture in life, quoting advice she received from her mother. “We all end up in the same place, so we may as well travel together and help each other out.”

If you have business concerns or would like to schedule free business counseling, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE “Counselors to America’s Small Business” at 920-496-8930 or visit www.greenbayscore.org.

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