



Ask SCORE for Business Advice

Add Unique Services

By Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

“I am seeing continual growth. Sales are up each month over the previous year. So far, year to date sales are up over 50% compared to last year.” So says Vickie Linssen, owner of Interior Motives Consignment Gallery, when asked how her business is doing in the economic downturn.

Linssen, an alum of the Urban Hope Entrepreneur Center, opened her business at 2520 E. Main St., Green Bay, in February 2006. The concept was new to the area – an upscale furniture and décor consignment store. The interior is unlike what you might expect to discover in a consignment store. With the furniture and décor displayed in actual room settings, it is hard to tell that the items are second hand. It looks new and fresh and exciting. It is part of the reason why Linssen has been successful.

“Until people visit the store they have no idea what upscale consignment really is. High-end name brands are found throughout the store. Everything is displayed tastefully in vignettes,” Linssen explained. “Recently, I had a woman stop in who was from Chicago and visiting family for the weekend. She had an SUV full of furniture and asked if she could consign with us. She said, ‘They don’t have anything like this in Chicago!’”

The consignment process is relatively simple. Consigners bring in an item to sell, and work with Linssen in pricing it. Once it’s sold, the proceeds are split 50/50. If the item hasn’t sold after six months or so, it is discounted each month until sold. This process keeps merchandise moving, and results in a continuous flow of new items. Linssen said that they might put 800 new items on the show room floor in a busy week.

The growth of the store has been impacted by the extra services that Linssen employs. She is adamant that her staff makes every customer feel welcome and insists on 100% “meet and greet.” She says it’s important to know what customers are looking for in order to service them properly, and has addressed the fact that many aren’t comfortable with decorating.

One of the more unique events she sponsors is a “Girls Night Out” where decorating tips are offered by 15 area businesses. Of the 15, four are scheduled for each event. Up to 40 customers can sign-up and participate. When they arrive, the larger group is broken into four smaller groups that rotate between the presenters spending 30 minutes with each.

The evening concludes with a dinner catered in from the Greenery Café, a business owned by another Urban Hope alum.

In addition to building customer loyalty, the business alliances have allowed Linssen to develop a solid network. She meets with the group on a regular basis to share ideas and make customer referrals. Linssen also attends Urban Hope Leader Group meetings and is a member of Management Women. These relationships provide a continuous source of ideas and spur creativity.

Some of Linssen's newest services include providing decorating services, room arrangement, color selection, and home staging. "Help can be as simple as having customers bring in some pictures of their room. Once they feel comfortable with us and respect our expertise, they start asking us to come to their home," Linssen noted.

Linssen attributes her business growth to listening to her customers, alliances with other businesses, continually searching for new ideas, and not trying to do it all. "When you try to do too many different things you spread yourself too thin and end up not doing anything well. In business, you need to stay focused," Linssen concluded.

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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