



Ask SCORE for Business Advice

**“Ask SCORE” Column in Green Bay Press Gazette
Sat., Sept. 5, 2009 by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt**

Be Open to Advice

In SCORE counseling sessions, some of the hardest clients to work with are those who already know the answer. They are sure that their business idea will succeed and have come to SCORE for additional verification. They don't want to hear anything that might challenge them.

There is a reason why astute entrepreneurs study demographics, psychographics, the competition, and business trends. The need to know more about consumer opinions is one of the reasons that social media has grown so rapidly.

Should you base a business idea on your friends? One of our clients thought that it was a good idea. The client insisted that her friends knew exactly what was needed in the marketplace and where it should be located. When asked if her friends could support her business to the extent that she would succeed, she reacted emotionally. Her friends and her network were her universe. She neglected to understand how small her circle was relative to the numbers that need to be attracted in order to succeed.

As an entrepreneur, it is dangerous to get caught in the realm of your personal experience. Certainly, experiences factor into your plans, but it is vital to be open to opinions that might be different.

For example, if a friend says that a location is bad, it doesn't mean it is. Listening to an opinion rather than reviewing data about the location could mean the loss of the best location for reaching potential customers. You need information from beyond your circle that is clear of bias and based on fact.

From back in my shopping center management days, I recall a department store manager who always wanted to advertise on his favorite radio station. It was a station that scored poorly in the market and attracted a very small segment of our customers. Yet, he liked the station and assumed everyone else liked it to. Thankfully, others took a more analytical approach and reviewed ratings and audiences before purchasing media. It was a valuable lesson in looking beyond our personal experiences.

Several years ago, a SCORE client decided to locate in an area of Green Bay that she thought showed strong growth. “I can't believe how many new houses have been built around here,” she said to support her position. Counselors encouraged the client to look at traffic counts, projected populations, and demographics. It might seem like a good area, but it was still a relatively small area. Since her business was niche retail, she needed to be in an area that matched her customer characteristics and provided the largest numbers possible.

Despite our concerns, she located in the area anyway. Unfortunately, her store was open for less than a year.

SCORE counselors want to help clients see the big picture. At the same time, clients need to be open and ready to question everything they are sure of.

If you'd like to learn more about financing your business, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE. Visit www.greenbayscore.org or call Cindy Gokey at 920-496-8930 for information.

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of [DB Commercial Real Estate](#) in Green Bay and Assistant District Director for SCORE, Wisconsin.