

Ask SCORE for Business Advice

“Ask SCORE” Column

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Finding a niche essential in business by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

In the past few weeks, this column has featured entrepreneurs who turned hobbies into businesses. This week features a business owner who stumbled upon a specialty through his love of classic cars. He didn't make a business from his hobby; his hobby led to a redefinition of his business.

Bill Fuecht, a Green Bay SCORE counselor and owner of Royal Distributing Co., purchased an existing business about 4½ years ago. At the time, the business sold auto parts, components and polishes. As the economy slipped, so did his sales.

"The auto parts business was very competitive," Fuecht explained. "I started noticing that sales were better in products used for detailing, especially the higher-end waxes."

Fuecht started going to local car shows. He set up a booth to sell finishing products and brought along his 1962 Volkswagen Beetle as a show car. He met car enthusiasts and listened.

Fuecht noted, "I found that there was a great deal of interest so I decided to learn everything I could to become a specialist. I went to detail schools throughout the United States and learned about top quality finishes and how to apply them."

As he discovered the need for higher-end products, Fuecht modified his business. He eased out of auto parts and components and focused on being an area expert in the application and supply of finishes. He looked for the best products available, and made them part of his line.

With his new status as an expert, Fuecht has given seminars at the popular Iola Car Show and others throughout the area. On Wednesday evenings, he gets together with members of Wednesday Nite Cruisin,' a group started years ago with about 30 enthusiasts. Meetings are held at the A&W Restaurant in Howard, and as many as 160 people now show up for a meeting where he often works with owners and demonstrates technique.

Since Fuecht loved classic cars before selling the products, his opinion is respected. "I just tell them how to clean their car, what to use and what not to use and what brings out the best finish in a car. It's all hands-on," he said.

The connections have made him the person to call for the best looking finish. He consults with and sells to almost every major car dealership in the area. When high-end vehicles come off the truck, a good finish emphasizes the vehicle quality and enhances its value.

As for Fuecht, his business continues to grow along with the number of classic car enthusiasts. Car shows have exploded in popularity with shows like one held at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College growing from a hundred cars a few years ago to 600 this year. For those displaying vehicles, they want to make sure that it looks as good as possible.

"The people are outstanding," Fuecht stated.

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and assistant district director for SCORE, Wisconsin.