

Ask SCORE for Business Advice

“Ask SCORE” Column

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Business center's partners help a start-up by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

Last week, at a SCORE counseling session, fellow counselor Robert Moore and I got some firsthand experience in the depth of experience offered at the Business Assistance Center at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College. Our client was a mechanical engineer who had invented an innovative machine that has great potential for alleviating a major shoreline issue. The invention is so good that we looked beyond the resources offered by SCORE to the other partners at the center.

Developed as a one-stop shop for business development and entrepreneur preparation, the Business Assistance Center is home to a number of nonprofit groups whose primary purpose is to educate and assist. Advance, a public-private partnership and program of the Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce, has a large business incubator to foster the growth of start-ups. Other groups include the Small Business Development Center, SCORE, the NWTC Center for Entrepreneurship, Wisconsin Business Development Finance Corporation, and the Wisconsin Entrepreneur's Network.

In reviewing the type of assistance that the other partners offered, I thought of Chuck Brys, a CPA and business counselor with the Small Business Development Center. With his strong background in manufacturing, Brys has considerable experience in bringing products to the market. He was able to join our session and hear the client's presentation. By asking the right questions, he helped define the options.

"I think that what really jumped out at me when I talked to him is that I thought he was thinking too small," Brys said, "He has solved a local problem, but the problem isn't just local. The real opportunity is in selling the equipment broad based across North America. In that there is great opportunity."

To further utilize the resources at the Business Assistance Center, Brys recommended meeting with Kurt Walhuetter, regional director of Wisconsin Entrepreneur's Network. Walhuetter has extensive experience in licensing and commercial innovation products. Like Brys, Walhuetter saw huge potential.

"He might start small the first year and make it a local service, but after that he has to decide what business model he will ultimately develop. There are numerous directions he could go," Brys said. Some of those options include operating a service business and developing a model that could be franchised, focusing on equipment sales, or planning to profit from replacement parts. There is a large, untapped market that could use the equipment or service.

Three groups at the Business Assistance Center have been involved already, and Brys envisions other collaborations, as well. He thinks this is a good example of how the partners at the center work together.

In addition, the groups have contacts of their own who can help open doors for new product development. Since the Small Business Development Center is connected with the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, Brys will be connecting the client with a few professors who are experts in the environmental field. The client will also be introduced to municipalities and other potential customers.

"Once he has his patent number, we're going to help him look at his patent from that perspective," Brys noted. "There is so much possibility."

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