

FIREFIGHTERS OF NORTHEAST WISCONSIN

Firefighters update

Caramel Crisp & Café

After two months of digging into the operations of Caramel Crisp & Café in Oshkosh, consultant Mike Thuecks with Green Bay-based SM Advisors has met with owner Chanda Anderson on a handful of occasions, met separately with Anderson's husband, Pete, and met privately with two of Caramel Crisp's key employees. The discussions helped provide perspective into some of the challenges Anderson faces in growing her business.



ANDERSON

"The findings are fairly typical of many businesses of this size," Thuecks said. "Chanda has become slave to the master. She spends a ton of time in the business just to make sure she can feel the pulse. Her and Pete's life is consumed by it and all of us agreed that one of the main objectives is to create a business that doesn't require them to be active 24/7."

Like many businesses that move into their second and third stages after start up, business owners often start off with strict discipline tracking measurable data and referencing it to make key decisions about the operation. As the business grows and the owner becomes more consumed managing the growth, that discipline tracking results sometimes becomes compromised.

"(Anderson) kept awesome data when she first started and used it to make good decisions," Thuecks noted. "She knew the number of customer visits, what they were purchasing in great detail, understood which days and hours were better, and even took note of the weather conditions."



THUECKS

As the business grew, Anderson found less time to manage these tasks and simply let the tracking process slip away.

Now all she sees is the month-end revenue numbers and doesn't know why she is growing at the rate she is," Thuecks said. "She's on an amazing stretch of being up every month over the year prior, but can't be precise in understanding why."

Thuecks has an extended strategic session planned for just Anderson and her husband later in July. Using the proprietary Stop Selling Vanilla Ice Cream Process developed by SM Advisors president Steve Van Remortel, the Andersons will work on better understanding what makes Caramel Crisp special and defining its competency, which is the reason why customers patronize it.

"Their (Chanda and Pete) drive and ability to take on risk is key to being a true entrepreneur," Thuecks said. "The beauty of Chanda is that she doesn't seem to be doing this for herself, but for others. She loves employing great people, she enjoys each and every customer visit, she is proud of the Caramel Crisp heritage, and she is driven to see downtown Oshkosh thrive. But most of all, she is given energy by being able to volunteer and serve the less fortunate."

Bridal Elegance and Formalwear

In our other Firefighters episode, Kaukauna's Bridal Elegance and Formalwear owner Lu Ann Vander Zanden described her work over the past two months with Appleton-based Guident Business Solutions as "an eye opener."

Guident owner Gary Vaughan consults with business owners from the perspective that every business decision is a financial decision at some level, and the business owner needs to regularly stay on top of their financial documents.

Vander Zanden said she's learning about profit and loss statements, as well as automating the vast amount of inventory she has in stock.



VANDER ZANDEN

"Currently we have it all in paper form and it's difficult to manage," Vander Zanden said. "Companies that we deal with discontinue gowns all the time and we are constantly updating inventory. The inventory is so large at this time that I need to look at creating a new budget for the inventory and to identify where we do well in sales and what items maybe I don't need to continue selling."

Vander Zanden said she can tell it will be valuable data because she only purchases inventory twice a year and needs to know how much she has available to spend when going to the market.



VAUGHAN

Another area of Bridal Elegance's operations that's escaped Vander Zanden's control has been the marketing budget. She said she advertises in every phone book, on the Internet, television commercials, hand out bags, cars, coffee mugs, street signs, billboards, place-mats, high school yearbooks, calendars, bathroom stalls and local high school basketball programs.

"In this business it felt like I was getting hit from every angle for advertising," Vander Zanden said. "This year was no exception and I spent double what

I should have.”

With Vaughan’s guidance, Vander Zanden will be seeking help from a marketing professional to identify where she should spend her advertising budget.

Vander Zanden said she and Vaughan have also been able to discuss building maintenance, which has been another emotional and financially draining issue. Vander Zanden owns the 110-year-old historic retail building in downtown Kaukauna, but has put a large sum of money into new windows, awnings, painting, brick work and a rubber roof during the past two years.

“I think we have one of the largest retail buildings (in downtown) and we are proud to show it off!” she said. “Hopefully with a completed budget we can accomplish more maintenance in the next year to get our upstairs completed.”

In addition, Vander Zanden said she and the team from Guident have been discussing changes to the bookkeeping software and investigating the possibility of revamping the store’s logo and brand identity.

Methodology

New North B2B kicked off its 2nd annual Firefighters of Northeast Wisconsin initiative in April 2012, aimed at assisting those northeast Wisconsin small business owners who feel as if they’re constantly burning the candle at both ends, putting out fires, spinning their wheels, but intent on finding a way to improve.

We put out a call for nominations back in January. In the end, our staff selected two area businesses for this endeavor: Bridal Elegance & Formalwear of Kaukauna and Caramel Crisp & Cafe of Oshkosh.

Through the generous help of Steve Van Remortel and Mike Thuecks of Green Bay-based SM Advisors and Gary Vaughan of Guident Business Solutions in Appleton, the two dedicated-to-improve businesses are receiving four to five month’s worth of consulting at no cost to help their owners work on the strategy of growing their business rather than regularly attending to problems.

B2B is providing a monthly update on the progress of their efforts in each issue leading up to a capstone article in the October 2012 issue of *New North B2B* magazine.



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Michele Bernstein
800.236.9832
tec@tecmidwest.com

www.tecmidwest.com