

A Moving Experience

When Susan Smith was planning the move of her business, City Dogs Grocery, she had some questions. Already an experienced small business owner, she wanted to run her ideas past someone who could guide her in relocating and negotiating a lease. She headed to the Small Business Administration (SBA) and found herself "down the hall" in the SCORE office. Here she was able to find the resources she was looking for in the form of Counselors Bill Slatin and Mike McEvers.

Susan was looking to expand. She wanted both more space for inventory and more space to take on additional products and pet accessories. Not only did Susan get counseling in the office but Mike went to both her current location and her proposed location in order to get a real "hands on" feel for what she was planning. Bill worked with her on her lease, setting up some guidelines - do's and don'ts - for her to follow in her discussions with her new landlord. Susan was able to confirm her plans with her SCORE counselors and went ahead with her move. Business is up in her new location and she is happy that she made her move.



Although SCORE was helpful, there are many reasons Susan achieved success. How Susan came to found her successful small business, how she is marketing her business and the bright future she is a part of in promoting all small businesses in the Indianapolis Midtown area are valuable stories to understand.

"Overnight Success?" - Not Really

Susan grew up in the Midtown area - Broad Ripple Village, Meridian-Kessler, Butler-Tarkington and Mapleton-Fall Creek. An existing business in the 56th and Illinois area called the Dog Food Shop was one of the stores she frequented all her life. Already a successful salesperson in the giftware business and an avid pet owner, she began thinking about "life after" and became interested in the store as her bridge to retirement. She spent 2 and 1/2 years working part time at the store while trying to work out a buyout with the owner. She learned the business from the ground up; reading trade literature, attending trade shows, and interacting with vendors and clients.

When she was unable to work out a suitable buyout with the owner, she decided to launch her own store. She chose a location at 49th and College and started up her business there in 2006. The business grew and by the time her 3 year lease was up for renewal, she knew she needed more space and had started looking at nearby locations. Finding the location she was looking for she engaged SCORE to help her with her move.

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Interesting Marketing Approach

Susan has utilized a number of interesting approaches to the marketing of City Dogs Grocery. She advertises in church bulletins and has run print ads in the Star, NUVO, and the Broad Ripple Gazette. She also has a column in the Gazette entitled "Howling at the Moon" about pets and the caring of pets. Even though the web site for City Dogs Grocery is quite modest - a simple home page with address, hours of business and contact information and a second page listing the brands of the products she carries - it plays a very important role in Susan's business. The vendors she deals with all have their own websites. One of the features these vendors support is a "nearest location" capability that customers can use to find the nearest retail outlet that carries their brand. Susan says in this modern world you would be surprised to learn how many folks are passing through or visiting Indianapolis and are on-line from their vehicles/guest location looking for a store that carries their pet's favorite food or treat.

Probably the most unique marketing activity that City Dogs Grocery takes on is the food sponsorship of the Butler Bulldogs mascot - Butler Blue II. Susan's father was a 1932 graduate of Butler and she does this promotional activity in his honor. This year with the basketball team in the NCAA finals here in Indianapolis, this sponsorship has been "a big deal" and there have been several events scheduled around "Blue" including a post tournament party the weekend after the final game.

Banding Together

Susan is a visionary and a great organizer. She understands that she cannot be successful unless all of the other surrounding small businesses are also successful. Her latest efforts in behalf of this cause are around a program called "Midtown Loves Local". The effort is all about supporting local business and the benefits to the entire community when its residents support local merchants and professionals. No one should be surprised, therefore, to find Susan's City Dogs Grocery on the list of the organizing committee and sponsors. For more information about this effort, go to their website: midtownindy.org

Written by Jake Moelk, SCORE Counselor