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Artist Entrepreneur Creates His Masterpiece: a Collaborative Green Energy Company

This existing business saw a 100% increase in gross receipts after consultation with the SBDC.

Somerset Waters was a musician who decided to focus his energy on creating a new masterpiece... a green energy co-op, co-owned by the workers he hired. Born in New Jersey and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, Somerset became an electrician and started trade school at a young age. He moved to Boston during the height of the dot com boom. Somerset was an avid music lover who played the cello on the side while he worked full time as an electrician. His music took off in 2003 when he went on tour after recording an album in Los Angeles. He eventually moved to the entertainment capital of the world, where he and his wife found themselves in an Eco-village in Los Angeles. Shortly afterward, Somerset heard a speaker say that because of the way artists minds work, they can be good at business since they know how to make things beautiful. He took that to heart and decided he'd go into solar, and make that business his masterpiece.

INDUSTRY

Energy

CHALLENGES

- How to grow and increase sales
- Marketing, communication of business
- Financial projections, value propositions

SOLUTIONS

- Improving the business plan, financials
- Refocused target customer
- Applying best sales practices

CLIENT IMPACT

- Landed a large account and doubled sales within a year.

Challenges

Pacific Electric installs solar panels and LED lighting. Waters provides modernization of apartment buildings that need retrofitting, and replaces outdated panels. However, he wanted a way to make the green energy business different. Waters wanted his business to grow, he had a large potential client in mind and had recently received a loan, but didn't know the best way to land that client. He also noticed that other potential clients didn't know much about the investments they were making into green energy. But he wasn't sure about the best ways to communicate what he was offering.



"I would absolutely recommend SBDC services to other small business owners. The SBDC vets their advisors. These are people who understand the business climate. The advice we received was current, manageable, relevant, competitive, and allowed us to really rock out. SBDC knows sales. They helped us figure out our value and how to frame our services to help people."

Somerset Waters, Founder
Pacific Electric Co-op



Best Advice

SBDC Business Advisor Don Loewel helped Somerset by working with him to better articulate his business to potential clients. Don also helped Somerset improve his business plan, working on realistic financial projections which helped him land more clients and increase sales.

Articulating the Energy

As Waters contemplated the right way to approach a new, large client, he realized he did not have enough background in sales to close the deal. "Don helped me tell the story about our business in a better way," says Waters. "He helped me figure out how best to represent the business and I realized that while we do residential, Pacific Electric had more value in the commercial sector." Loewel helped Waters tweak his business plan and financials to reflect the new focus.

More than "Flipping the Switch"

Waters wanted to make sure his potential clients saw him and his workers as more than just "flip-switchers." So early on he decided he'd offer his employees a piece of the business, allowing them to become co-owners of his cooperative energy company, and clients "energy agents. He also wanted to provide his clients more personalized service, teaching them about solar energy and how they could get the most out of their new investment.

Inside the Mind of a Sales Person

"One of the things I learned from Don was how to put myself in the customer's shoes as I shared information about my business. I really needed to know what it is to do sales, figure out what sales people are like, what they do, and how to manage them." Loewel worked closely with Waters to find out the best practices for sales in his industry and showed him how to apply those practices. Suddenly his business was booming. "This is a movement," says Waters. "Energy independence is an interesting and beautiful concept. We want to be a big player in that."

Client Impact

Somerset Waters started his business in January 2014, and sought help from the SBDC in November 2014. Since receiving consultation from the SBDC Somerset says his gross receipts have doubled. He landed a high profile commercial client, created new jobs and moved in a new location. Water's future plans include growth that allows for offices of 20 worker-owners in Downtown, Southbay, and other parts of the greater Los Angeles area. Waters plans to make Pacific Electric a publicly traded company so that the worker-owners can work close to home, as they invest in their nearby business and leverage more solar jobs.