



My experience with Micro Business Development Program included both objective criticism and advice regarding my business plan for Switchback Brewing Company. They were the only third party consultants I needed to get the company started. Being a technically oriented person, my plan was strong on budgets, projections, and engineering, but my sales and marketing plan was biased toward the nuts and bolts of sales. The marketing was more or less nonexistent. I am naturally resistant to what I think of as “marketing”, but Gillian Franks of MBDP discussed the importance of having an accurate portrayal of one’s company so customers could understand the business they were supporting. It is a lesson I still use and teach my staff, with the result being a focus on telling our story and remaining true to our vision. All this derived from my consultation with MBDP where Gillian helped me understand that marketing could be a tool for good!

I don’t think the value of having a dispassionate and knowledgeable resource for advice when developing a business plan can be overestimated. The staff at MBDP is immersed into the business culture in a way no new entrepreneur can be. I would never have known the Chittenden Bank had just released funds for a business loan program without the inside knowledge from MBDP. Sure enough, that loan started my business as well as a sixteen year banking relationship with (now) Peoples United Bank.

From this start, we have grown beyond our “micro” status. As a company, Switchback remains focused on our community. We provide very good paying jobs with extraordinarily generous benefits and profit sharing. Over the years our charity budget has grown substantially, with a focus on local charities often chosen by our employees based on their personal interests. We love sponsoring fun and unusual events, and are annually the Vermont State Parks best attended day with our “Earn Your Beer” hike up Mt Philo culminating in with beer and bluegrass music. And of course, now the company is 100% Employee Owned. We have taken on the slogan “Vermont Owned Forever!” to express our desire to always be a Vermont company. Not a bad marketing slogan since it just reflects our reality. Thanks for that little marketing lesson Gillian!

Bill Cherry