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Couple Achieves their Startup Dream

Thanks to help from the SBDC these deli owners are bringing healthy menu choices to South Los Angeles.

Brooklyn Deli & Mini Market offers a taste of New York in Southern California, specializing in fresh sandwiches and deli products made with premium ingredients. Hakeem and Remmietta Dolphin launched the store to provide healthy menu options in a community with few fresh restaurant options.

Challenges

The couple always knew they wanted to start a business and worked in corporate America to gain experience before they started their own venture. In 2012 the couple visited the Small Business Development Center hosted by El Camino College for assistance with obtaining financing for their dream deli.

INDUSTRY

Food

CHALLENGES

- Business planning
- Financing
- Marketing

SOLUTIONS

- Business plan development and review
- Financing options review
- Market research and marketing channel identification

CLIENT IMPACT

- Secured private funding
- Featured in L.A. Weekly
- Became profitable in less than one year

Best Advice

SBDC Business Advisors Nathaniel Jemison and Samantha Sproson helped the Dolphins in a variety of areas including: market research, business planning, financing, and marketing.



“With the SBDC’s assistance with our business plan and marketing, we were able to secure private funding to build our dream.”

Remmietta Dolphin, Founder
Brooklyn Deli & Mini Market



Make A Plan

Sproson helped the Dolphins develop a business plan that would appeal to potential financing sources and assisted them with conducting market research. “She helped me identify our competition, assess the maximum reach we could get and analyze the neighborhood,” says Remmietta. “This benefited us quite a lot.”

Know Your Options

The Dolphins also benefited from the education Jemison gave them about various financing options for funding their startup. “Securing capital was our biggest challenge,” Remmietta recalls. “Nate explained various ways—[including] loans, crowdfunding, angel investors, grants and certifications we could get. Instead of having to research and digest it all ourselves, he provided the information in a way that was easy to understand.”

When the Dolphins decided to apply for a business loan, Jemison guided them to possible lenders. “Unfortunately, we were unable to secure a loan, but that didn’t stop us,” says Remmietta. Instead, the determined couple financed their startup with personal savings and funds from friends and relatives.

Marketing Doesn’t Have To Break The Bank

“Samantha gave me several outside-the-box marketing ideas,” Remmietta recalls. “She told me that traditional advertising—such as magazines and newspapers—should wait till later, when we can afford it.” Instead, Sproson advised using free or low-cost tactics such as flyers, word-of-mouth and email.

For example, a Metro train tunnel that will connect to LAX is being built on the block where Brooklyn Deli & Mini-Mart is located. “I did an email newsletter, contacted the Metro and asked if I could send it to their construction crew,” Remmietta explains. “I also did a separate [email] newsletter for Metro workers.” Those emails alone generated lots of business, which the Dolphins supplement by handing out flyers to passersby. They are also planning a U.S. Postal Service mailing to approximately 1,000 local residents within a one-mile radius of the deli, which they expect will attract even more customers.

Client Impact

Since opening for business in September 2014, Brooklyn Deli & Mini-Market has enjoyed steady growth. The store is currently attracting several new customers a day and has been featured in L.A. Weekly.

In the future, the Dolphins plan to expand their delivery and catering capabilities and ultimately open a second location. “We’ve catered some lunches for film crews, and hope to do more of that,” Remmietta says.

They remain in contact with the SBDC and avidly recommend the organization to other small business owners. “We’ve already given three people the address and details of assistance they offer,” says Remmietta.

