



On Stage Music Academy

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New Music School Launches Thanks to SBDC

The SBDC helped this musician and educator bring his dream business to life in just six short months.

A classically trained musician from an early age, Bill McRae spent many years performing and composing on keyboards, guitar and bass. After college, he became a music business executive, then a classroom teacher. In 2014, McRae decided he wanted to open a music school to share his love of music with students of all ages. Now open, the On Stage Music Academy offers introductory music classes, hands-on education in various instruments and genres, and experience in both recording and live performance.

INDUSTRY

Music

CHALLENGES

- Business planning
- Marketing plan development
- Licenses and permits
- Location search and lease negotiation
- Hiring employees
- Accounting

SOLUTIONS

- Business plan development, market research and financial projection assessment.
- Multichannel marketing plan development
- Permitting and licensing assistance
- Introduction to network of SBDC resources and service providers
- Accounting, hiring, and management system development

CLIENT IMPACT

- Launched business in six months
- Hired six employees

Challenges

McRae looked at other music programs and wanted to create something different—his own unique system and school. Although he grew up in a family business, and had worked as a sole proprietor pulling together teams of musicians to play, opening a business with employees would be a whole new experience. Throughout his career, McRae has always found that reaching out to others for advice and assistance pays off, so he visited the Small Business Development Center hosted by Long Beach City College for help with his idea.

Best Advice

SBDC Program Coordinator, Janice Grass managed McRae's consultations with SBDC Director Mike Daniel and Business Advisors: Se' Reed, Brad Pollak, Joseph Jackson, Laura Lara and Vi Pham. The team at SBDC helped McRae assess the viability of his idea, complete a business plan and marketing plan, research suitable locations for his startup, obtain necessary licenses and permits, negotiate the legal and HR challenges of hiring employees, and learn to use QuickBooks accounting software.



“The SBDC helped me find someone to work on a logo, people I could reach out to for insurance, an architect, a contractor—so many names! There is a huge benefit to removing doubt in a venture so full of the unknown. The SBDC gave me the resources, knowledge and confidence to move forward without questioning.”

Bill McRae, Founder
On Stage Music Academy



Just Do It

When he first met with Daniel, McRae said “I had been in the process of building a big, honkin’ business plan for months.” Daniel showed him how to focus on the financial planning aspect of the business plan so he could immediately assess his idea’s viability. “Making sure my business model was financially viable gave me an assurance that I could move forward,” McRae says. “That was freeing, because I could start taking [action] instead of waiting until everything was perfect.”

Put the Pieces in Place

With his business plan in place, McRae moved quickly. “The SBDC was very helpful in bouncing ideas off of,” he says. Attorney Pham answered his questions about everything from leases and contracts to business structure.

Meanwhile, Daniel connected McRae with other service providers. “He helped me find [someone] to work on a logo, people I could reach out to for insurance, an architect, a contractor—he gave me so many names,” McRae recalls. After finding an ideal location in Long Beach, McRae again turned to Daniel to learn about getting business licenses and permits and having building plans approved.

“Mike has been a sounding board for me,” McRae says, “and every bit of information he gave me helped me move forward into the unknown with confidence.”

Learn the Systems

Although McRae had done bookkeeping as a sole proprietor, getting hands-on help from QuickBooks expert Lara made a huge difference in his comfort level. “I had some training, but [learning from] someone who does bookkeeping day-to-day makes a big difference,” he explains.

As McRae began to move his business along, he was unsure about whether to hire contractors or employees for his new business, so he turned to Jackson for guidance. “Jackson worked with us on the HR messages that we use when communicating with employees and potential employees [to stay] within California law,” McRae says. Daniel and Pollak are helping him write an employee handbook, define job descriptions, clarify expectations for employees and develop a workplace culture.

Make a Marketing Plan

Pollak, a former music executive, provided marketing advice. “Besides being a veteran of the industry and applying his knowledge to my issues, he’s very entertaining,” says McRae. “We get a lot done in a lighthearted way.” McRae worked with Pollak to identify the best marketing channels, refine his message, and create a step-by-step marketing plan that covers everything from an elevator pitch to direct marketing to events.

Meanwhile business advisor, Se Reed helped McRae prioritize how he developed an online presence. “The focus was on developing the website so that anything else we did paid off when people visited the website,” he says. McRae also avidly attended all of the marketing classes Reed taught.

Client Impact

“Bill was great to work with and pushed through the [startup] process in a six-month period,” said the SBDC Long Beach Director, Mike Daniel. Combining his musical experience with his Business Advisors’ expertise, it seems McRae already has a hit on his hands. Just months after the business launch, the school already has a strong base of students. McRae kicked off his marketing using Groupon and Amazon Local offers, which attracted customers from near and far. “A good number of them have continued as students,” he says. A successful grand opening attracted the attention of local newspapers, and as word-of-mouth builds in the neighborhood, McRae is beginning to target a more specific local clientele.

Within the next four months, McRae’s goal is to be at 50 percent of capacity. Over the next two years, he plans to expand beyond the school’s beginner base and into intermediate/advanced classes, developing a music community that is varied in terms of genres, skill levels and ages.

To accomplish these goals, McRae continues to work with his SBDC Business Advisors regularly. “Getting advice from people who aren’t academics, but who walk the walk, is the biggest benefit [of the SBDC],” he says. “They are so giving.”