



## Painting a Bright Future, One Brush Stroke at a Time

**Artist and entrepreneur grows her business by increasing inventory, hiring employees and moving into a better location with help from the SBDC.**

It all began with discovering the right paint. Longtime artist, Cindi Rowley stumbled upon Chalk Paint® Decorative Paint by Annie Sloan and was immediately blown away by its versatility and quality. What's more, she couldn't believe there wasn't a shop nearby that was already selling it. Thus began her journey as a first-time business owner. Rowley the artist (who has an extensive resume creating beautiful murals and restoring vintage furniture) became Rowley the entrepreneur practically overnight as she opened her first business: a store called Refined Vintage Boutique.

She began distributing the chalk paint as well as selling her own creations, which included restored vintage furniture, in 2011.

**Refined Vintage Boutique**  
27674 Newhall Ranch Rd, Suite 15  
Valencia, CA 91355  
661-505-7175  
[www.refinedvintageboutique.com](http://www.refinedvintageboutique.com)

### INDUSTRY

Retail: Vintage Gift Store  
Repurposed & Refurbished Furniture

### CHALLENGES

- Accounting
- Growth Plan

### SOLUTIONS

- Quickbooks Training
- Business Planning
- Social Media/Outreach Strategy

### CLIENT IMPACT

- Sales increased by 25%
- Expanded inventory by 60%
- Created 2 new jobs
- Moved from an industrial space to a retail plaza in Valencia
- Raised email marketing efficiency by 75%

### Challenges

A couple years after opening, Cindi's business was stagnating. She wasn't sure what her next steps should be. One thing she did know was that she needed major accounting help. She found a Quickbooks class through the SBDC hosted by the College of the Canyons.

Cindi recalls thinking, "How much is this going to cost me?" To her surprise, the class was free. In fact, she was shocked to discover that all the support and education through SBDC wouldn't cost her a dime.

"When you open a business, people are always trying to charge you for this or that, so finding out I could learn how to do all this for free was pretty amazing," Cindi told us.

Cindi was paired up with advisor Helene Liastos who initially taught her how to use Quickbooks, but her mentorship grew to encompass helping Cindi create a business plan, which included relocation, what type of employees Cindi needed and social media strategies.



Small Business Development Center hosted by College of the Canyons  
[www.cocsbdc.org](http://www.cocsbdc.org) • 661-362-5900

**“I would definitely recommend the SBDC to anyone who needs help with their business. You won’t believe how much they care and want you to succeed!”**

–Cindi Rowley, Founder, Refined Vintage Boutique



### Best Advice

“She had a number of accounting needs, like bringing balances correctly forward to the current year. A big pain point with her was keeping track of inventory, the manual check versus what’s in the computer, learning how to issue invoices and sales receipts that allows for controlling inventory. So all of that accounting was necessary,” Helene said.

“Throughout the tenure of me being with her we developed a very good bond, a friendship if you will, my consultation was enlarged to include business growth. Without good financials you can’t position yourself to really grow and feel comfortable about it.”

Helene explains that she guided Cindi through creating a sound business expansion plan, which meant figuring out if that was even something Cindi and her husband – who was ready to retire – wanted to invest the time and money in doing. After some thought, Cindi decided to go forward with her expansion plans. Helene guided Cindi through some big decisions like whether to hire employees or use independent contractors, as well as pointing her in the right marketing direction.

Cindi attended an email marketing seminar through SBDC that she says helped her immensely in reaching out to her clients and understanding the basics of email marketing.

“Before I went to an email marketing seminar I had only sent emails from my Gmail account. I really didn’t understand how email marketing could help. It taught me how email marketing works, the best time to send and what content is best to directly impact my business,” Cindi explains.

“Email marketing is how I have survived in this business, being able to reach customers and let them know what workshops and other events are going on. I hear all the time from customers, ‘I look for

your emails.’ I would guess it’s helped by 50% to improve sales. In the new store it has helped even more, it gives customers a chance to follow what is going on or changing at the store.”

### The Next Phase of Growth

With the help of the SBDC, Cindi was prepared to take the next steps toward expanding her business, which included moving from an industrial park to a retail shopping center. She also added two employees to her team and switched her email communications from her limited personal Gmail account to a more robust solution: MailChimp, growing from 300 contacts to about 1300. Lastly, she expanded her inventory – more than doubling it, to attract a larger demographic and bring in more revenue.

### Client Impact

Rowley said that she grew by 100% after getting advice and instruction from SBDC. Part of the success was her ability to manage the accounting while still creating and teaching art.

The changes Cindi made boosted sales by 25% in the past six months. While hiring a part-time bookkeeper and switching over to MailChimp boosted efficiency by 75%. Her email marketing program has also helped increase customer awareness by more than 50%, Cindi estimates.

Along with the tangible benefits, Rowley points to the mental support SBDC offers. “SBDC is empowering. To know they’re on your side is incredible. I definitely felt more confident in business after taking classes there and knowing how many tools are at my disposal,” Rowley said.

