



Yoga-urt

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INDUSTRY

Food and Beverage

CHALLENGES

- Financing
- Business Planning

SOLUTIONS

- Startup Loan Packaging Assistance
- Connection to PCR Community Advantage Loan Program
- Business Plan Development
- Investor Relations Management Assistance
- Lease Negotiation
- Business Formation

CLIENT IMPACT

- Obtained Startup Loan for \$110,000
- Increased efficiency by 75%
- Named in *Top 3 Vegan Fro-Yo & Ice Cream Desserts* by LA Times in 1st year of operation

Vegan FroYo That Puts Kindness, Community and Flavor First

SBDC empowered this visionary entrepreneur to open her business with a plan, a loan, and a great idea.

While taking a sabbatical from the corporate world, Melissa Schulman spent “the best year of her life” immersing herself in yoga and becoming a certified yoga teacher. This experience led to the idea of providing respite to others in a way similar to that in which she found comfort by offering both yoga and yogurt in a zen-like community setting as a business. Finding it most practical to focus on yogurt only, the idea of Yoga-urt, a plant-based soft serve that could be delicious while using only top-quality organic, gluten-, soy-, and-dairy free kosher products – was born.

Challenges

Without capital, experience starting her own business or a refined business plan, the Los Angeles native had to start at square one on her journey to opening Yoga-urt. The problem was, she wasn’t sure where to begin. Despite having a background in business, she knew she needed help. So she heard about the the Pacific Coast Regional SBDC in 2012 and took the entrepreneurial training program offered there. She was also paired up with her advisor, Harold Hart-Nibbrig, who helped her refine her comprehensive business plan which took nine months to create and finalize.



“My main consultant believed in me from the beginning. That is huge because not everyone did...I had no money at the time to move it forward, not even the product. Plus, I had never worked in a restaurant before. [My advisor] gave me great advice...would challenge me at times, encouraged me, and was there for me when I needed him.”

– Melissa Schulman, Founder, Yoga-urt



“My main consultant, Harold Hart-Nibbrig, believed in me from the beginning. That is huge because not everyone did. Telling people that I wanted to open up an organic frozen yogurt store called Yoga-urt, did not go over well with everyone. To add to that, I had no money at the time to move it forward, not even the product. Plus, I had never worked in a restaurant before. Harold gave me great advice on my business plan, would challenge me at times, encouraged me, and was there for me when I needed him,” Melissa said.

Best Advice

After two years of saving money to start her business, a retail space in Glendale’s Kenneth Village became available. Melissa approached her adviser, Harold, at the end of 2014, with a more realistic business plan, better financial profile and personal funds she saved in hopes of securing a loan. Harold, who not only helped her develop a business plan, also guided her through investor issues, site leases and the formation of her company, was impressed by what she had accomplished within a couple of years.

“At that point I plugged her into the Pacific Coast Regional Small Business Development Corporation’s Community Advantage loan program (Myron Perryman, Program Director). Myron, Melissa and I worked together to successfully package a start-up loan for her. My consultation is ongoing and will likely continue into her growth and expansion. She has some larger plans for the future,” Harold said.

Just nine months after opening her first store, Melissa is seeing her business plan take shape. Not only has she gained new customers each week, she’s also gotten great reviews about her product, including being named one of the top three, “Great Vegan Fro-yo and Ice Cream Desserts” across Los Angeles by the Los Angeles Times.

The Next Phase of Growth

Melissa says that the business plan she developed with the help of SBDC enabled her to have a clearer, more practical plan for the future, something she could actually put on paper and finance. Based on her original vision during that “yoga bubble” year when she was immersed in yoga, her ideas about product, brand and the physical setting of a shop developed into a clear plan and strategy.

So far, she’s on track with her first goal of becoming an established community destination by end of first year as she says more and more people from all over Los Angeles County and beyond are flocking to her store, which has a “zen-like” feel that’s inviting and comfortable. Her plan also includes opening a second store after year two and up to five stores by year five.

Client Impact

Melissa secured a \$110,000 loan with the help of the SBDC which enabled her to get the necessary equipment and inventory to open her doors. She says that without PCR’s Community Advantage Loan, she would’ve had to postpone opening her business by at least two years. Furthermore, by partnering with the SBDC in refining her business plan, Melissa estimates that it’s boosted her efficiency by 75%.

“My plan helps me get the right restaurant consultants on board, to trim back when necessary, to withstand the very few negative comments we’ve ever received and enabled me to think beyond single serve to a bustling business in pints. It also helps me keep my eye on the prize beyond the setbacks or slow, rainy days,” she says.