

SPRINGBOARD
B U S I N E S S
D E V E L O P M E N T
P R O G R A M

Springboard Business Growth Program Introduction

**Strategic Economic Solutions Pty Ltd
and
CREEDA Projects Pty Ltd**

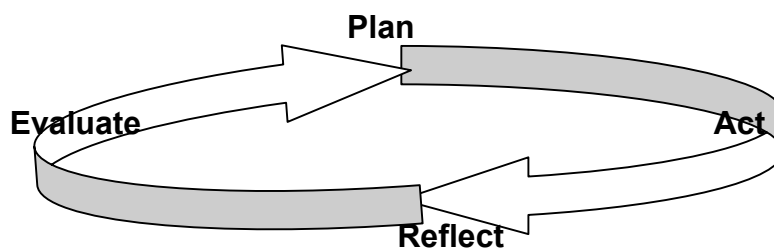
July 2005

Introduction

Research has shown that only about 20% to 30% of home-based, micro and small business operators genuinely want to grow their businesses. We have found that a larger proportion are keen on growing their profits, but do not have enough business planning skills to do so. The remaining 70% to 80% of business operators seem generally happy with their current situation, whether it is for lifestyle, business, family or other reasons. This majority, though, usually complain they are 'too busy', especially if their business is successful, and we have seen more businesses struggle to manage growth than struggle to find customers.

The two important segments of the home based, micro and small business market are those that want to grow, and those struggling to manage increasing sales. Both these segments are ripe for business development skills delivered in the right way. And with better skills they can generate additional wealth and employment for their proprietors and their communities, especially with more sensible regulations.

Growing a business relies upon good business planning, integrated into the management of a business. This is not the same as preparing business plan to obtain a loan, but requires an attitude that welcomes evaluation and continuous improvement.



All too often home based business are too caught up working **in the business** to ever work **on the business**, to use the language of Michael Gerber's *E-Myth* publications.

Research into how small and home based businesses learn shows that peer to peer learning is paramount; learning from trusted networks, as opposed to more formal learning mechanisms¹.

Our area of focus of the last six years, as experienced small business practitioners, has been a determination to find a way of engaging home-based, micro and small businesses in growth activities.

¹ Michael Schaper, previously Professor of Entrepreneurship and Small business at Newcastle University and now Small Business Commissioner in the ACT, has encapsulated this in presentations to the Business Entry Point and other organisations.

SpringBoard Business Development Program

The *Springboard Business Development Program*™ is specifically designed for growth oriented home based and small businesses. It is based on facilitated peer to peer learning, in groups of 12 to 15 businesses and with delivery by local skilled facilitators (not 'trainers').

In every location in which the program has been conducted its benefit to participants has been evaluated carefully, and its success has been shown in a variety of ways.

- It changes people's attitudes! People complete the program with improved, serious and realistic intentions to grow the business and employ people. This means they are what may be called "business planning ready".
- Barriers to growth shifted from external to internal, i.e. those the business person can control.
- Follow up surveys show that the intention translates to reality.
- The participants enjoy the process and recommend the program to others.
- Meeting immediate skill development needs at the same time as serving as a catalyst for people to develop skills to grow their business
- Groups continue to meet under their own steam

Another important benefit has been for Councils, who do not always like their compliance and regulatory image. Councils who have supported the program have shifted from being seen by home based businesses as *impediments* to being *enablers* in the quest for economic development. Sometimes the program has spurred a Council to undertake regulatory reform, for instance the Marion City Council in Adelaide.²

A feature of the program is local delivery, with local facilitators. We have had no difficulty finding suitable facilitators whom we train to conduct the program. A side benefit is enhancing the capability of local business consultants and support services.

² The outcomes of the Marion City Council Springboard Program are profiled on page 16 of *Home-Based Business, Local Opportunities*, published by AusIndustry.

"Motivational - and made me aware of general business aspects ie bookkeeping etc"

"It was a good opportunity to think outside the square"

"I enjoyed it immensely and am looking forward to further interaction with the group"

"Very practical advice and ideas"

"We got more out of it than my husband got out of a \$3,000 3-month coaching program"

"I cannot speak too highly of how this has helped our business consciousness. Thank you [facilitators]."

"I was confident in expanding my business and have just finished "Stage 1". I now have information and access to information that would give me confidence in moving into "Stage 2"

We have worked with home based businesses throughout Australia since the mid-1990s. This has included research, leading to publications such as *Back Yarders and Front Runners*³, as well as helping growth oriented businesses and developing, and creating and improving the *Springboard Business Development Program*.

To date the program has been delivered in: the ACT, the Sunshine Coast, Southeast NSW; Narooma (as a part of a Small Town Renewal Program); the Cities of Marion and Onkaparinga in Adelaide; Western Sydney (Parramatta, Blacktown and Baulkham Hills LGAs); Lake Macquarie (NSW); and the Cities of Monash, Stonington and Melbourne. As a general rule Councils are involved and at times they have been the main driver. Participants are readily prepared to pay \$200 per head to undertake the program, which involves eight two hour sessions. They may be prepared to pay more but this has not been tested. To date public subsidies have underpinned the program.

The *Springboard Program* is unique. While there are many seminars for home based business, this is the only program focusing on growth oriented businesses and built upon facilitated adult peer to peer learning principles.

The *Springboard Program* is proven and documented with facilitator training, manuals, selection procedures, workbooks and reading materials, so it can easily be implemented by local organisations and people. It is ready for scaling up and replication more widely.

³ *Back Yarders and Front Runners*, Department of Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business 1999.

Testimonials from businesses who have completed the Springboard Program

The following quotes have been extracted from program evaluations:

Western Sydney

"The program was real 'eye opener'"

"It was a good opportunity to think outside the square"

"We got more out of it than my husband got out of a \$3,000 3-month coaching program"

Marion, South Australia

"The program helped with confidence and goals - thanks!"

"I appreciated the opportunity to attend."

"I thoroughly enjoyed the course – thanks to [the facilitators]."

Stonington, Monash and Melbourne

"Very practical advice and ideas"

"It stimulated lots of ideas and raised awareness in the areas that I needed to work on"

"I enjoyed it immensely and am looking forward to further interaction with the group"

"Extremely motivating, could not have asked more from facilitator"

The following is taken from an evaluation undertaken 2 years after the program in Melbourne was conducted:

"Changes in employment and growth forecasts suggest that the program has short-term benefits as well as heralding longer-term changes. The participants continue to report that the program was generally effective in meeting their business development needs and overall the businesses still place a high value on participating in the program."

Narooma

"Motivational - and made me aware of general business aspects ie bookkeeping etc"

"[I got] new ideas, the time to sort strategies out in my mind and group discussions"

"I was confident in expanding my business and have just finished "Stage 1". I now have information and access to information that would give me confidence in moving into "Stage 2""

"I realised what I must do"

*"Thank you. Thank you! It has been very rewarding,
motivating and helped me a lot"*

*"I cannot speak too highly of how this has helped our business consciousness.
Thank you [facilitators]!"*

*"It has given me a positive view of what I need to carry out in the near future in
planning and progressing my business. It has opened my mind and scope to try
improving my business methods"*

Program Outline

Each Springboard Business Development Group will determine the specific program content in negotiation with their facilitator.

Session 1 Registration - Introduction and Networking Session

This session brings together all the participants and facilitators involved in the Springboard Business Development Program. It is an opportunity to meet other business in your local area. After the introductions and networking time, each group will get together with their facilitator. The aims, objectives and content of the program will be discussed and agreed. Participants are asked to bring along a short business biography of no more than 250 words to be compiled into a 'who's who' of the Springboard Business Development Program

Session 2 Small Business - Mickey Mouse or Mini Empire?

This session starts with the big picture, the pros and cons of doing business in your area, and then focuses in on the more specific personal aspects of each business. What are the key issues and challenges in running and growing a business: managing time and stress, balancing work and home life, working and as well as on your business.

Session 3 Marketing I: What sort of business are you in?

This session focuses on defining businesses in terms of customers and markets. Who are the competition? What makes the participants' businesses different to other businesses in their industry, town or region. What gives them the market advantage? Which product or service developments would bring greatest returns?

Session 4 Marketing II: Getting the word out, marketing yourself and your products

Once they have defined their market niche this session considers how participants can most effectively reach their potential customers and build a broader customer base.

Session 5 Benchmarking financial performance and structuring your business for growth

This session focuses on how well participants know their business. Knowing the specific costs and returns of each type of business activity gives an insight into where development time and ideas should be invested. Structuring business for growth means setting up and fine-tuning the systems that will allow growth - without burning out! Effectively interacting with financial institutions can be a key challenge.

Session 6 Information and communication technology - making it work for you

A key concern for people in small business, in this session participants will sift through the 'hype' to determine which technology can really add value to their business and how to get the support they need to really make it work.

Session 7 Growing your business - Making decisions and planning action

In this session the broader implications of growing their business will be considered. Participants will be encouraged to consider the context in which their business development plans sit, and form action plans and strategies based on their work in the program, with a focus on strategies that will help their business to grow - sustainably - so that they have a balanced approach to their life and their business!

Session 8 Networking function and presentations

This final session brings the members of all the groups back together for an opportunity to meet, network, discuss business and develop opportunities. The session will include presentations of certificates to all participants who have successfully completed the program. Time will also be given for feedback and evaluation of the program. Participants and facilitators are encouraged to plan a review meeting for later in the year.