

## Great Resources for Small Businesses in North Carolina: Small Business Centers by Martin Brossman

*Are you considering starting a business?*

*Do you have a business running but find it hard to find and afford resources to really build your business?*

If you answered yes to either question, take a moment and imagine the existence of a remarkable resource center, right in your local area, one that offers you free or very affordable high-quality support. You can go there for help with creating your business; building your business or selling your business. No business is too small or too large to gain access to the resources offered. Instead of having to locate and pay for high-quality training for yourself and employees, this center makes it easy to attend ongoing training tailored to your business needs. And, to your delight, the center is staffed with highly-trained consultants who are well-networked with community resources all over the state.

If you haven't already discovered it, this "imaginary" resource center exists in North Carolina, and there are 58 of them from mountains to coast. They are called Small Business Centers (SBC), part of the Community College System and supported by your tax dollars—truly an investment in the economic development of businesses in the state. They are "right in our backyard" and all you have to do is show up and take advantage of them!

I have been training in Small Business Centers since 2006 and have been moved and inspired by the wonderful people who have attended my classes. One man who invented a unique machine for bailing pine straw was using his website to successfully sell the several thousand dollar device across the country. Another man, who had lost his job, was building a business helping children's book authors speak in high schools, as well as making their books available to schools online. A director of a center doing wonderful work with children with disabilities found a way to sell donated items on eBay that allows the non-profit center to expand its services. And in one rural area I had the privilege of teaching conflict management skills to a room full of managers who oversee large farms; discussing real world problems and finding real world solutions. It's wonderful to see the greatness of our communities at work.

Through teaching at various Community College locations, I have gotten to know the talented SBC Directors who bring an abundance of personal experience and networked resources to everything they do. They not only have connections in your community to help you, but also have access to all 58 SBC networks. They have connections with the local Chamber of Commerce and many other contacts they draw on to help you with your business success.

At every SBC I have been to, they have a rich resource center with books, CD's, government resource publications and often computers loaded with software that you can use for your business. These centers are free for your use and provide tools for planning, research, cash flow projections and budget analysis.

One director told me how he has had the opportunity of helping an individual create a machinist business, aid in staff development as the employees grew, and is now assisting them with landing a major aerospace contract. Another director mentioned how someone came to her to start a greenhouse. She did not have a local resource to help so she used her statewide resources and found a greenhouse business in another area that was successful and able to help this new business. A local bed-and-breakfast got networked through the Small Business Center to work with other bed-and-breakfasts in other areas of the state to help each other.

I want to list a few of the great resources just waiting for you to take advantage of them:

- Confidential one-on-one and group business counseling. Including advisory councils to help businesses learn from other businesses.
- Free or low-cost seminars to help start new businesses to get going in the right direction. Resources to help existing businesses with personal issues, hiring, motivation, product development, pricing, competitive analysis, market - product and customer retention.
- A massive network of contacts and information to address just about any questions a business has, as well as helping the business know the right questions to ask.
- Assistance from SBC Directors in finding financing resources for your business with their contacts in the community and around the state.

If you want to keep a competitive advantage, you can't afford not to use the Small Business Center in your area. If you gain value from these resources, be sure to tell a friend. The win-win goal we can all help achieve is to increase the community usage of the SBC classes and resources. It is vital for the Centers to operate at full capability to help keep the funding strong and our communities vibrant. Find out what your SBC has to offer, get involved and let them know how they can help you. If you have not been to a Small Business Center in NC, or not been in a while, you can find the one in your area at: [www.sbcn.nc.gov](http://www.sbcn.nc.gov)

*Do you have a story of being helped by a Small Business Center? Let us know for a future article.*

Looking forward to hearing your stories of success!

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