

Building Your Own Business From the Ground Up: Linda Brandt's Formula for Success by Melissa Stanz

Back in 1998, Linda Brandt, a former advertising media executive who had successfully climbed the slippery corporate advertising slopes in New York City, found herself staring at Asheville, NC's yellow pages advertising agency category. She took a deep breath and began calling those listed businesses in alpha order, asking for the media director, and asking for any kind of media project they could offer her. A few obliged, and a business was born.

Today Brandt (LB Marketing Services) enjoys a superb reputation and an excellent client list. It took her two full years to establish LB Marketing Services in the Asheville area, and she called up all the internal fortitude and passion she possessed to make it happen and now she is celebrating 10 years in business.

Those qualities are equally apparent today and are her guiding business principles. "I love what I do, and I work very hard for my clients," she said. "Their business becomes my business and it's important to me that their marketing achieves the desired results."

Her clients feel equally passionate about Brandt. "We interviewed marketing consultants for more than a year before we hired Linda," said John Laughter, owner of Shelley's Jewelry in Asheville. "Most of them were selling products, not marketing my company. Linda listened and built a plan around our customer needs; a plan that would meet those needs. She's a great person who is willing to listen. She's helped us for many years by melding and blending the things that are good for you, your company, and your customers."

Building a business from the ground up is never easy, but Brandt believed in herself from the beginning. After leaving the high pressure advertising world in Manhattan, she moved with her husband Barry to Asheville in 1992 for a new job he accepted. She spent six years as a stay-at-home mom, raising two boys. The day her youngest son started school, she dropped him off, went to an interview and got her first advertising project. "I wanted to help financially contribute to the family and I missed working. I was very determined and I had a plan," she said.

Her self confidence and her abilities as a marketing guru got her through those first two years, but like most of us, she had her moments. She made a choice to come to the small city with her family, and she asked herself more than once if she could make it. Could she make a living in this market, especially after serving Fortune 500 clients and managing \$100 million ad budgets?

"I had to call up all my courage and passion, I had to stretch. I knew I could build my own business, and I did not want to go back to the corporate grind. I had to learn how to translate Fortune 500 business techniques to small businesses with small budgets. It was hard, but the basic principles of marketing don't change," she said.

Brandt also knew networking was key to building her business. She joined the Asheville Chamber of Commerce and became an active member. She went to all the events, she

shook hands with everyone, volunteered on several committees, and attended and conducted seminars through the organization.

“I worked harder than I ever worked in my life during those years,” she recalled. “And I did not make much money. But I believed that good marketing was desperately needed by the smaller businesses in this market.”

She noted that all too often when she asked potential clients about their marketing, they had done little planning and had no consistency of message.

“The more I talked to potential clients, the more I saw this great need. I knew I had the background to help them, and that built my confidence,” she said.

Another tool that helped her business grow was research. She analyzed the market before she jumped in, finding that there were plenty of businesses that fit her target market. She knew these businesses could sustain her business for the long run. Part of that research involved simply getting out and talking to people, building relationships.

Today she works with several clients in Western North Carolina and Upstate Carolina in all types of industry. She basically functions as a marketing director on an outsource basis, providing businesses with the experience of a veteran without the overhead. She taps into the area’s rich pool of freelance talent as needed, providing full agency services at a fraction of an agency’s cost.

As her business continues to grow, she finds herself moving in new directions too. While she loves what she does with her clients, she also sees the need to tell more people about the tenants of successful marketing, so she is now accepting speaking engagements in the area.

She offers the following advice to anyone who is thinking about starting their own business.

- ❖ Before you begin, ask yourself is this really my passion. If so, it will drive you, even during the lean times.
- ❖ Prepare yourself for two years of hard work with limited income.
- ❖ Each year, re-evaluate and set goals. They help you focus on what you want and show you your progress.
- ❖ Conduct research on a continuous basis.
- ❖ Find and develop a mentor. This person need not be in your industry. Or it could be someone in your industry but in a different geographic market.
- ❖ Build a support network, a Board of Directors, real or faux. They will guide you and listen and help you through good times and bad times.

Brandt’s road to business success is paved with these principles—internal and external things that drive her. For more information, visit her website, www.lbmarketingservices.com or contact her at lbmarketing@charter.net.