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Local spotlight

Experience enhances cachet of consultant

Retail firm adviser uses his success and failures, contacts to help start-up firms survive hard times.

Maureen McDonald / Special to The Detroit News

SOUTHFIELD -- Now is the perfect time to open a business, according to retail consultant Paul Bensman. Labor, retail space and innovative ideas abound in a challenged economy.

"All it takes is an attitude adjustment," said Bensman, owner of Details in Retail Inc., a consulting company for business start-ups. "We see retailers with double digit growth when they discover and develop their entrepreneurial spirit."

Bensman, whose quotes about retail operations appear in media outlets all over the region, knows the sweet taste of success and bitter agony of bankruptcy.

In addition to working in the commercial real estate field for the past decade, he consulted part-time with small retail and wholesale businesses on marketing, promotion and cash-flow questions.



Piezano's Pizza Panini co-owners Pete Daleo, left, and Vincent Giacalone talk with Details in Retail's Paul Bensman. Piezano's business has been good enough in one year to make plans for a second location. (Daniel Mears / The Detroit News)

Extras

Details in Retail

- Specialty: The Southfield-based business offers affordable consultations with up to 22 specialists to help start-up business owners find retail locations, accounting, advertising and market planning.
- Contact: Call (248) 358-6904 or go to www.detailsinretailinc.com

Over 760,000 new businesses started in 2006, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration. An ominous 50 percent fail the first year because of such factors as lack of experience, poor location, poor credit arrangements, unexpected growth and fierce competition. He aims to level the playing field with better coaching.

"Paul helped me find a location, design the layout and develop an advertising strategy," said Vince Giacalone, 42, owner of Piezano's Pizza Panini in the Midtown district of Detroit. He came to Bensman with a dream of owning a pizzeria, but a lifetime of experience in construction. Business has been good enough in one year to make plans for a second location in Highland Park.

"If I did this by myself I'd still be painting walls," Giacalone said.

Bensman, who came of age with the Beatle's song "A Little Help from My Friends," tapped colleagues in real estate, accounting, franchise fulfillment, advertising, public relations, law, restaurant equipment supply and construction to provide low-cost help in exchange for volume referrals. He offers his own assistance free for the first visit.

Is entrepreneurship safer than a steady job?

"Let's face it," Bensman tells a client. "In today's global economy no job is safe ... Every day people are stepping forward to create their dreams. Some people have been putting away money for 20 years. Others have family and friends willing to invest."

Dreaming a dream is not enough. Bensman said he shares with clients the failures -- choosing a dead-end location or buying too much merchandise -- as lessons to avoid. He reminds clients that even mega-entrepreneur Donald Trump has had his share of ups and downs over the years.

"The biggest hurdle to overcome is the fear of failure, the fear of the unknown," Bensman said. "Once you decide to go forward, we can help you design a logo and a basic Web site, conduct effective marketing and advertising. We'll help you get into business reasonably."

Maureen McDonald is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.