

March 2012

Monthly Connection

Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) & International Trade Center (ITC)

At

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
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5 Reasons you have to work with an SBDC this year

“Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) are partnerships between the government and colleges/universities administered by the Small Business Administration and aims at giving educational services for small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs.”-SBA.gov

If you are a business owner and you have not worked with the SBDC in the past, then 2012 is your year. There are 5 key reasons that you need to develop a relationship with your local SBDC.

1. **It's Free** - When it comes to the service that SBDCs provide you just can't beat their price. It is free to work with SBDC counselors because your tax dollars have already paid the cost. Usually the saying, "You get what you pay for" has a lot of truth to it, but when it comes to the SBDC the saying just doesn't hold true. Most of the SBDC staff that I have met in the past are experienced business owners who exited their business, and now want to give back by helping other small business owners succeed.

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Workshop Information



Starting a Business in Illinois Workshops

This workshop is highly recommended for any prospective business owner and encouraged for any existing business. It covers the following topics: an orientation to Illinois SBDC services, financing options, business plan development, organizations in our area that assist with taxing and licensing, and overview of other requirements for starting a business in Illinois. After you attend the Starting a Business in Illinois Workshop, you may continue your relationship with the Illinois SBDC at SIUE by setting up an appointment with a counselor. For more information or further assistance, please call 618-650-2929 or 618-482-8330, or visit: <http://www.siu.edu/business/sbdc>

Lending 101 Workshops

These workshops are presented by Loretta Holmes with Associated Bank (East St. Louis) and by Theresa Ebeler with Bank of Edwardsville (Edwardsville), and will focus specifically on commercial financing, small business bank loans and preparing for financing. For more information or further assistance, please call 618-650-2929 or 618-482-8330, or visit: <http://www.siu.edu/business/sbdc>

Annual Lenders Forum

Who: Lenders needing information about federal and state programs for small businesses, including program changes

When: Wednesday, March 7th 2012

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. Program will begin at 9:00 a.m. and conclude by 12 noon.

Where: Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Campus, 6 Hairpin Drive, Edwardsville, IL. 2nd floor of the Morris University Center in the Illinois Room

Registration: Contact SBDC Secretary Jane Bagent at 618-650-2929 or jbagent@siue.edu

Cost: No charge for attendance

Funded in part through a Cooperative Agreement by the U.S. Small Business Administration, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic opportunity, and the Illinois Small Business Development Center

Workshop Dates



Scan the QR code with your smart phone to register for the Starting a Business in Illinois workshop

“Starting a Business in Illinois” in East St. Louis

Thursday, March 29th (3:00 pm – 5:00 pm)

Thursday, April 29th (3:00 pm – 5:00 pm)

“Starting a Business in Illinois” in Edwardsville

Tuesday, March 13th (3:00 pm – 5:00 pm)

Thursday, April 12th (3:00 pm – 5:00 pm)

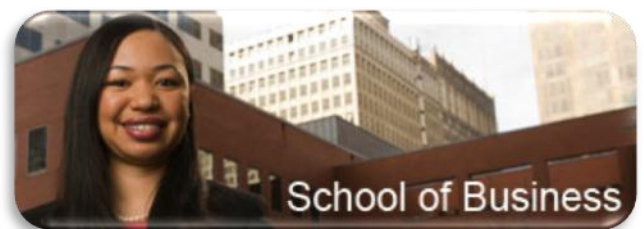
5 Reasons you have to work with an SBDC this year

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2. **Bankers Love SBDC** - If you are looking to secure a loan, or may need a loan in the future, working with your local SBDC is going to score you some major brownie points with the bank. Bankers like to take referrals from the SBDC because they know if the business owner is smart enough to work with an SBDC counselor, they are probably committed to the success of their business, and to the full repayment of a loan. The SBDC has a number of resources, and the know-how to help you put together a strong loan application that will impress your banker.
3. **Market Research** - SBDC has access to some very powerful market research tools. For example the Indiana SBDC states on website, "The ISBDC has access to many nationally recognized market research databases. ISBDC Business Advisors can help you use these tools to locate accurate and relevant industry information. Find the information you need to know about your industry; including market trends, best practices, current conditions, industry leaders, and future industry-specific technology."
4. **Accountability** - When you develop a plan to grow your business who keeps you accountable? When you are the owner, sometimes it is easy to let goals and deadlines that you set for yourself slip by. One of the largest benefits of working with SBDC is a partner in your business who will keep you accountable. Your SBDC counselor is going to help you do things like get your books in order, keep you focused on your customer, and help you develop a board of directors. These are the tough things that you need to focus on now
5. **No Ulterior Motives** - When you work with private small business advisors and consultants, you never know if they have ulterior motives when providing advice. Are they really on your team, doing what is best for you? Or are they mostly concerned with growing their own consulting business? SBDC counselors are not paid more or less if you are successful, so there is little room for them to have ill motives when providing advice.

Look, if you are serious about growing your business in 2012, then check out the team and the resources at your local Small Business Development Center. The relationships, advice, and networking opportunities that you will have when working with a SBDC counselor may be exactly what you need to take your business to the next level this year.

-Written by Adam Hoeksema, writer and business plan expert



Ten Tips for Choosing a Tax Preparer

From the Internal Revenue Services (IRS)

Many people look for help from professionals when it's time to file their tax return. If you use a paid tax preparer to file your return this year, the IRS urges you to choose that preparer wisely. Even if a return is prepared by someone else, the taxpayer is legally responsible for what's on it. So, it's very important to choose your tax preparer carefully.

This year, the IRS wants to remind taxpayers to use a preparer who will sign the returns they prepare and enter their required Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN).

Here are ten tips to keep in mind when choosing a tax return preparer:

1. **Check the preparer's qualifications.** New regulations require all paid tax return preparers to have a Preparer Tax Identification Number. In addition to making sure they have a PTIN, ask if the preparer is affiliated with a professional organization and attends continuing education classes. The IRS is also phasing in a new test requirement to make sure those who are not an enrolled agent, CPA, or attorney have met minimal competency requirements. Those subject to the test will become a Registered Tax Return Preparer once they pass it.
2. **Check on the preparer's history.** Check to see if the preparer has a questionable history with the Better Business Bureau and check for any disciplinary actions and licensure status through the state boards of accountancy for certified public accountants; the state bar associations for attorneys; and the IRS Office of Enrollment for enrolled agents.
3. **Ask about their service fees.** Avoid preparers who base their fee on a percentage of your refund or those who claim they can obtain larger refunds than other preparers. Also, always make sure any refund due is sent to you or deposited into an account in your name. Under no circumstances should all or part of your refund be directly deposited into a preparer's bank account.
4. **Ask if they offer electronic filing.** Any paid preparer who prepares and files more than 10 returns for clients must file the returns electronically, unless the client opts to file a paper return. More than 1 billion individual tax returns have been safely and securely processed since the debut of electronic filing in 1990. Make sure your preparer offers IRS e-file.
5. **Make sure the tax preparer is accessible.** Make sure you will be able to contact the tax preparer after the return has been filed, even after the April due date, in case questions arise.
6. **Provide all records and receipts needed to prepare your return.** Reputable preparers will request to see your records and receipts and will ask you multiple questions to determine your total income and your qualifications for expenses, deductions and other items. Do not use a preparer who is willing to electronically file your return before you receive your Form W-2 using your last pay stub. This is against IRS e-file rules.
7. **Never sign a blank return.** Avoid tax preparers that ask you to sign a blank tax form.

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Fighting Unemployment Fraud to Help Grow Jobs

From the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES)

Enhanced Enforcement Will Protect Unemployment Integrity, Punish Fraud, Save Tax Dollars

CHICAGO - Garnishing tax returns of people wrongfully collecting unemployment insurance benefits is among the initiatives to increase tax fairness and reduce operating costs for businesses, the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) announced today. The programs are part of Gov. Pat Quinn's plan to improve the state's climate for job creation and strengthen the Illinois economy.

"Protecting taxpayer dollars is our top priority at the Illinois Department of Employment Security. These anti-fraud measures will save businesses millions of dollars in taxes over the long term," IDES Director Jay Rowell said. "This is just one part of our new IDES plan which is focused on safeguarding taxpayer dollars and getting people back to work."

Thwarting scammers from collecting unemployment benefits when they already have a job will save \$40 million each year. Additionally, IDES will seek to garnish federal tax returns to recover \$158 million from individuals who refused to enter into a payment plan. More than \$1 million already has been collected when individuals were notified that their returns would be garnished.

The programs are part of Gov. Quinn's bi-partisan reforms that are expected to save businesses more than \$400 million, provide 16 percent unemployment insurance tax reductions for companies that did not lay off workers and punish those that defraud the unemployment insurance program.

Unemployment insurance benefits are funded through business contributions. Preventing fraud and recovering improper payments protects taxpayer dollars and reduces the cost of doing business, which creates a climate more conducive to hiring.

The IDES supports economic stability by administering unemployment benefits, collecting business contributions to fund those benefits, connecting employers with qualified job seekers, and providing economic information to assist career planning and economic development. It does so through nearly 60 offices across the state, including the Illinois workNet Centers.

IRS article continued from Page 4

8. **Review the entire return before signing it.** Before you sign your tax return, review it and ask questions. Make sure you understand everything and are comfortable with the accuracy of the return before you sign it.
9. **Make sure the preparer signs the form and includes their PTIN.** A paid preparer must sign the return and include their PTIN as required by law. Although the preparer signs the return, you are responsible for the accuracy of every item on your return. The preparer must also give you a copy of the return.
10. **Report abusive tax preparers to the IRS.** You can report abusive tax preparers and suspected tax fraud to the IRS on Form 14157, Complaint: Tax Return Preparer. Download Form 14157 from www.irs.gov or order by mail at 800-TAX-FORM (800-829-3676).

Making Print Marketing Work for Your Business

Marketing is an important part of growing a successful business. To help our clients' print marketing succeed, we "asked the experts," **Premier Digital Printing, a full service design, print and mail marketing provider in Collinsville.**

Your Image

When you think of marketing or branding, what comes to mind: Websites, Email blasts, Promotional items, Facebook, Twitter, or other social networking sites? Jim and Vickie Broyles have owned Premier Digital Printing in Collinsville for several years, and remind their customers to use print marketing effectively. They ask their customers, "What about your image on printed material -- the branding of your company? How does your image make you look?" Some examples:

- The logo quality on your letterhead and envelopes. Is your address printed or stamped on with a rubber stamp & crooked?
- What about your marketing brochures? -- folded straight? color look crisp? Mailing to your clients with a postcard or self mailer? The quality can reflect a poor image of your company to your client.

Direct Mail Services

If you are investing money on direct mail, you can save approximately 50% on postage by mailing your products utilizing "bulk mail". According to the Broyles, usually you must use a "bulk mail permit" to do that, but their customers do not have to. They will work with you to use your current mail list, order a mail list that targets your best customers, or purchase a mail list for specific demographics: zip code, house value,

income or other specific criteria such as, specialty lists for teachers, vehicle data, brides to be, occupations, and health professionals. Using variable printing technologies, the information that you already have such as your customers name and address can be turned into a personalized postcard or self mailer.

Jim and Vickie Broyles also suggested that when marketing to your clients, keep the message simple. Their main advice was to: Make your "call to action" clear, know your customers; repetition is also crucial, it's best to mail more than once.

Database & customer analysis

Here are some tips that Premier Digital Printing had on reaching customers:

Having an updated customer address list will help save you money on undeliverable mail pieces.

QR codes work like bar codes but when scanned by a smart phone it takes your customer directly to your website or other designated location, e.g., a coupon on your website!

For more information, contact Premier Digital Printing:

Call 618-345-2055

Visit www.premierdigiprint.com

or

Scan this QR Code:



Contact Information

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www.facebook.com/il.sbdc

SBDC Website

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ITC Website

<http://www.siue.edu/business/itc/itcnocpointsofcontact.shtml>