Small Business Success Story

Milwaukee Public Library

Adults

Small Business Success Story

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$51-100

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Byline

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Small Business Success Stories is an ongoing series featuring diverse local small business owners and entrepreneurs sharing their inspiring journeys. The goals of this program are to amplify the voices and stories of diverse small business owners and connect aspiring entrepreneurs with a support network.

The first program in the series was held in March 2022 and is ongoing.

Advanced Planning

Planning began about a month prior to the first program. Initial presenters were from existing connections and, at the time, the program was not focused on diverse business owners. Further brainstorming and reflection shifted the focus to its current iteration as one way the library centers equity and supports communities of color. Presenters were then identified by research, referrals and word of mouth. Challenges in the initial phase were mostly technical, as the start of the program coincided with the start of the pandemic.

Marketing

The Milwaukee Public Library has a Communications and Marketing department that creates marketing pieces for library programs. They created a flyer and posted about the program on official library social media channels. What we found most successful programs was having the program lead and presenters share news of the program within their own networks. It really demonstrated the power of word-of-mouth marketing.

Budgeting

The programs are free for people to attend and presenters were paid an honorarium of $100.

Day-of-event Activity

The only setup needed for in-person events is the chairs and the podium/TV screen for the presenters.

Program Execution

The programs have gone very well leading to inspirational presentations by entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds doing business in various sectors including makeup artistry, a recording studio, a wedding planner, a moving business, a marketing company, and a graphic design studio. The attendance has grown from one or two attendees to 13. At one presentation the business owner “went live” on Facebook bringing in 50 more viewers and joining the five of us in the room.

The best feedback we have received has been from our BIPOC presenters as they were looking for a way to share their experiences with others and haven’t found a platform that was willing AND excited to give them a safe space to give back to their communities by sharing their stories/triumphs/failures with other community members. This was one of the key goals of the program and we are so happy to see its success, thanks to the vision and dedication of our program lead and collaborators.

Advice

We advise other libraries to find entrepreneurs who are successful (making a profit), have an interesting story to tell, are willing to be brutally honest about their experiences (where they may have fallen short of their goals, etc.), are open to answering questions about every aspect of their business, and be willing to give advice/tips/tricks of the trade to others.

We have found that if the presenter brings a unique business idea to the table you will get attendees in the door. We tried to choose businesses that were outside the norm, for example, we had a seamstress present her tailoring business but also knowing that she is a teacher (she teaches sewing classes) and a fashion designer to boot. She brought in a lot of attendees just due to her large circle of “fans”, so we would try to identify presenters who are extremely passionate about their business and have a solid local following. This way you can get a fabulous grassroots promotion happening for your program(s) besides the marketing/promotion your library might provide.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images



More Programs

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Image



Summer Sidewalk Poetry Competition

Audiences:

Intergenerational
Oct 3, 2023
Intergenerational+ | □□
Image



Community Displays

Audiences:

Intergenerational