

Vancouver Self-Starter, Organizing Expert Explains How She Launched Successful Business

Business consultants have been telling potential entrepreneurs to start a business based upon a skill, interest or ability they're passionate about.

Combining a market's needs or wants with a individual's passion can often lead to a successful enterprise.

For instance: technology has streamlined the work and communication processes, but people's lives are more cluttered than ever. Rowena List's small business declutters them.

"People want to know how to have a simpler, stress-free life, and being organized is one of the fastest ways to achieve that," says Rowena List, the 46-year-old founder of Getting It Together in Vancouver, B.C.

List did just that. Ever since she was a child, she loved to organize anything that needed order. A good time for this precocious 10-year-old was organizing a friend's room or her parents' medicine chest.

When she was a young woman, List never thought about starting a business based around her hobby. She was intent on building a career in sales. A comfortable communicator who enjoyed working with people, she had the qualifications for a successful sales career.

She first started thinking about launching an organizing business after helping many of the salespeople she worked with organize their offices and their routines. She knew that the effort not only would make them feel better, it also would result in increased productivity. She was right.

Six years ago, List made her move and put her passion for organizing to the ultimate test, and launched Getting It Together, whose mission was organizing people's personal and business lives.

Here are the steps she took to get it off the ground:

- **Checked out the marketplace.** List looked at her marketplace to see what kind of competition she faced.
- **Created a business plan.** In it, she outlined her goals and how she intended to achieve them.
- **Kept start-up costs low.** From the outset, List opted to work out of her home. Her startup costs totaled \$3,000 -- the bulk of it was spent on building a dynamic Web site, which promoted her business; the rest was spent on business cards, domain names, stationery and office materials.

To this day, List is a one-person business. “I believe in running a tight ship and hiring experts -- an IT person to upgrade my technology, accountants or business consultants -- on an as-needed basis,” she says.

To promote her business, List sent out press releases to businesses, nonprofit organizations, and radio and TV stations.

By speaking at schools, and trade and professional associations, where she passed on organizational tips, she got herself better known in the community.

In the process, she established herself as an expert in her field. List also produced her own CD of organizing tips, which she sold to consumers and businesses. “I went out of my way to get the word out,” she says. It paid off in turning a profit within six months of launching her business.

Keys to success

List says she attributes her success to a few factors. Along with hard work, she says that business skills honed as a salesperson had a great deal to do with early success.

“Before I started my business, I understood the principles of money management, but most important, I knew how to mine leads, find prospects and close a sale,” she says.

If you’re thinking of starting a home-based organizing business, List advises taking courses in business operations and sales.

“These are bedrock skills every new business owner must have,” she says.

Finally, List says that no matter how solid business owners’ business concepts, they ought to be prepared for rough seas and difficult times. If they’re confident and secure in their abilities, they stand an excellent chance of being successful.

Rowena List can be reached at rowena@gettingittogether.ca or check out her Web site at www.gettingittogether.ca. For more information about the organizing niche, visit Professional Organizers of Canada (www.organizersincanada.com); Online Organizing.com (www.onlineorganizing.com); the Board of Certification for Professional Organizers (www.certifiedprofessionalorganizers.org); and the Organizing Network (www.organizingnetwork.com).