

The Columbus Area Chamber is the creator of SmallBizU—the largest online training academy for small businesses in the United States.

1. Program/Service Name

SmallBizU: The Online Training Academy for Small Business
(See the full program online at www.smallbizu.org/columbus)

2. The Core Chamber Strengths Addressed

The Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce is a nationally recognized advocate and leader in the delivery of small business education. SmallBizU is a demonstration of our Chamber's strength in the strategic area of **Focus**—the Chamber helps build stronger communities by staying focused and involved in the top business, civic, and social priorities.

3. Program/Project Summary

The Columbus Area Chamber is the creator of SmallBizU. The program is the largest online training academy designed specifically for small businesses. It is a collection of twenty-two online courses designed to teach entrepreneurs the “3Ms”—Money, Marketing, and Management. Each course is delivered via the internet full of animated slides accompanied by voice-over narration, PowerPoint presentations, worksheets, toolsets, and access to a comprehensive knowledgebase.

The key outcomes for SmallBizU are:

- To provide small business members with a practical knowledge of how to better manage their businesses.
- To increase member retention and engagement for our vital base of small business members.
- To generate non-dues program income by packaging the best practice and licensing SmallBizU to other economic development organizations.

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Chamber members demonstrated a 38 percent increase in learning retention compared with traditional classroom training.

4. Needs Identification

- a. *Identify your target audience(s) and the needs your program/service meets. Needs should be clearly identified and ties to the organizational mission should be demonstrated.*

The target audience for SmallBizU is members with less than ten employees. These businesses represent 70% of our membership and create the majority of new jobs within our community.

Most people who start a business know a skill and try to build a business around it. Therein lies the fatal fallacy: a technician assumes because they know the skill that they know how to manage a business that does the work. They end up working *in* the business, but not *on* it. To solve this, they need to learn the basics of business management.

By teaching fundamental management principles, SmallBizU builds on a primary aspect of the Chamber's mission which is to foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

- b. *Discuss your needs identification and data collection process for your project or program.*

To identify needs, we designed five prototype courses. We invited 100 members to take the courses and complete an online survey which was used to improve the program. We also contracted with Kutztown University to conduct an independent study of the program's effectiveness. The survey showed a 38% increase in learning retention compared with classroom training.

- c. *Include as exhibits your anecdotal or formal evaluation results, such as research, key facts, figures, or trends about your community or target audience, situational analysis and/or copies of any survey instruments if used.*

Please see the following exhibits:

- SmallBizU Survey Instruments
- Sample Survey Results for a Selected Course

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SmallBizU teaches small businesses the 3Ms
—Money, Marketing, and Management.

5. Program Objectives

- a. *Discuss the goals and objectives for the program, relative to your identified needs and target audiences. Objectives should be clearly stated, specific, measurable, and time sensitive (“SMART”).*

Overarching Objective:

The Chamber offers unique business-building programs **focused** on critical business priorities. The overarching objective of SmallBizU is to teach the management fundamentals of the 3Ms—money, marketing, and management—to our small business members.

Development Goals:

- Create 20 branded courses to be deployed before January 2008.
- Translate 30%+ of the course content into Spanish by June 2008
- Add four new courses to the curriculum each year.

Process Goals:

- Deliver 2,500+ online courses to members each year.
- Bestow 250 training certificates each year.

Results-Based Goals:

- Increase the growth of two out of every three members who receive training.
- Package and license SmallBizU in a strategic effort to generate at least \$250,000 of program income each year.

- b. *Include electronic and/or hardcopies of strategic or project plans as supporting material.*
- SmallBizU Strategic Plan and Proposal at end of synopsis

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78 percent of members cited growth in their businesses directly attributable to SmallBizU.

6. Methodology

- a. *Discuss the methods used to reach the objectives. Please list specific actions taken.*

The methods used to reach the objectives were as follows:

Design and Development:

The development of SmallBizU began by prototyping a few courses that were assessed by our small business members. Once improvements were made, we partnered with Indiana University to accreditate the courses.

Marketing and Communications:

Next, a comprehensive marketing strategy was created and materials were distributed to all professional service providers and media contacts. Offices of local government also agreed to distribute the marketing materials to all new businesses applying for a business name or license.

Course Delivery:

Members access SmallBizU through the Chamber's website. Once a course is completed, a member is prompted to complete a short survey before receiving their training certificate. These survey results are used to constantly improve the program. In one year, another email survey is sent to determine if the training had direct and immediate impact on their business.

Future Growth:

The Chamber licenses SmallBizU to other economic development organizations and uses these licensing fees to develop additional content and translate the course work into other languages.

- b. *A detailed budget should be included, indicating expenses, revenues and in-kind contributions.*
- Detailed budget follows.

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Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce, Inc.
SmallBizU Program Budget
Program Year 2009

| | | 2009 Budget Amount | % |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| INCOME | | | |
| 1 | License Fees | 275,000 | |
| 2 | Other Program Income | 12,000 | |
| 3 | Total | 287,000 | 100.00% |
| EXPENSES | | | |
| 4 | Personnel | | |
| 5 | Total | 79,500 | 27.70% |
| Payroll Taxes and Related | | | |
| 6 | Payroll Taxes (PEO Fees) | 11.50% | 9,150 |
| 7 | Pension | 10.00% | 7,950 |
| 8 | Health Insurance | | 3,400 |
| 9 | Other Bonuses and Benefits | | 16,000 |
| 10 | Total | 36,500 | 12.72% |
| Administrative | | | |
| 11 | Accounting and Auditing | | 2,500 |
| 12 | Advertising | | 8,500 |
| 13 | Equipment Purchases and Lease | | 2,500 |
| 14 | Insurance | | 1,000 |
| 15 | Internet Communications | | 3,000 |
| 16 | Legal | | 1,000 |
| 17 | Office Supplies | | 1,500 |
| 18 | Postage | | 1,000 |
| 19 | Printing and Publications | | 2,500 |
| 20 | Trade Shows and Events | | 7,500 |
| 21 | Training and Education | | 2,000 |
| 22 | Travel | | 3,000 |
| 23 | Total | 36,000 | 12.54% |
| 24 | Total Expenses | 152,000 | |
| 25 | NET INCOME | 135,000 | 47.04% |

More than 42 percent of the Chamber membership has taken SmallBizU business management courses.

7. Communications

- a. *Provide an outline of your chamber's communications strategy for the programs or service, including specific marketing, communications, advertising, and/or public relations vehicles.*
- b. *For each description of the communications vehicle, include the communications points and/or call to action communicated as well as the target audience you intended to reach.*

To generate awareness of SmallBizU, the Chamber created the following communications strategy:

Print Brochures: Were mailed to every member with the call to action to visit SmallBizU on the Chamber's website.

eNewsletters: Sent to all members who previously enrolled in SmallBizU classes to update them about new courses and content.

Promotional CD-ROMs: Provide an overview about the program, interactive demonstration courses, and direct access to the SmallBizU academy online.

Free Seminars: Provided quarterly, these free seminars cover the content of one SmallBizU course as a way to build visibility for other online courses.

Chamber Membership Kit: All prospective members are provided these kits. Brochures about SmallBizU are included as part of the return-on-investment member benefits.

Multimedia Tradeshow Booth: Created to travel to national tradeshows to sell SmallBizU as a licensed best practice to other economic development organizations.

- c. *Briefly describe how your chamber developed and then executed its communications strategy to inform your intended target audiences about your program/service.*

The communications strategy for SmallBizU was created by the Chamber's Small Business Committee. The strategy was designed so that each tactic could be tracked for effectiveness by using a unique web address embedded within each type of media.

- d. *Appropriate supporting materials including web pages describing the program, ads, brochures, guides, press releases, speeches, etc.*
 - Supporting Media follows

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SmallBizU is now delivered by 100 economic development organizations within twelve states to over 25,000 small businesses each year.

8. Evaluation

- a. *Demonstrate the impact your program or service had on your community and/or membership. Outcomes of your program or service should be related to your stated program objectives. Partial or projected information is acceptable.*

By all means, SmallBizU has been a tremendously successful program having greatly impacted the Chamber membership and gained national attention as a best practice in entrepreneurial economic development.

Development Outcomes:

By the end of 2008, more than 22 SmallBizU courses were available online within the training academy (www.smallbizu.org/columbus) and more than 8 courses were available in Spanish. By the end of 2009, four new classes will be available. A typical course ranges anywhere from 170 to 230 slides and is presented over a one to two hour period.

Process Outcomes:

Last year more than 3,600 SmallBizU courses were delivered to Chamber members and 324 training certificates were presented. An independent study conducted by Kutztown University revealed that Chamber members demonstrated a 38 percent increase in learning retention compared with traditional classroom training. In addition, training costs per member were only \$4.50 per participant as opposed to \$31.50 with traditional workshop training—an 86 percent reduction in program costs.

Key Outcomes and Results:

More than 78 percent of members surveyed cited revenue growth in their business that was directly attributable to the management fundamentals taught within SmallBizU courses.

What's more, SmallBizU has been recognized nationally as a best practice. It is now licensed and delivered by more than 100 economic development organizations within twelve states to over 25,000 entrepreneurs and small businesses each year.

By licensing SmallBizU to economic development organizations, the Columbus Chamber generates nearly 32 percent of its annual operating budget from income generated from the program.

- b. *Demonstrate the outcomes of your communications related to your program or service. Partial of projected information is acceptable.*

Program awareness and penetration within the Chamber membership has been exceptional. More than 42 percent of the Chamber membership has taken SmallBizU courses over the last year. Due to the communications strategy, from the beginning of 2008 until April of 2009, the number of SmallBizU enrollments has grown 48%.

c. *Identify appropriate supporting materials including data about increased sales, awareness, and membership; participation survey results; member or participant testimonials.*

- Participant Survey Summaries
- Member and Key Stakeholder Testimonials follow

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SmallBizU Key Summarized Survey Results and Performance Statistics

| Survey Finding or Performance Metric | Results |
|--|-----------------|
| Percent of Chamber Members taking a Course | 42% |
| Increase in Learning Retention (Source: Independent Research Study Conducted by Kutztown University) | 38% |
| Courses Delivered to Chamber members | 3,612 |
| Training Certificates Delivered | 324 |
| Training Delivery Cost Reduction | 86% |
| Percent of Members Realizing Revenue Growth (Directly attributable to management fundamentals taught) | 78% |
| Overall Satisfaction Average Rating | 6.68 (out of 7) |
| Enrollment Growth from 2008 to 2009 | 48% |



TESTIMONIALS

What are some of our customers saying about our products?

"SmallBizU provides a missing link in serving the time-sensitive needs of today's small business owners and entrepreneurs. The quality of the curriculum and the combination of public and private sector partners makes this an exciting addition to the resources available to Indiana Chamber members and the entire business community."

—Kevin Brinegar, President, Indiana Chamber of Commerce

"I wanted to take a moment and congratulate you on a very special product. I've only used SmallBizU a few times, and already I see the value in it. It covers much of what I learned as a MBA in a much shorter time frame, and it does it well."

—Amar Patel, President, The Entrepreneur's

Aide

"We used the Financials Forecasting Module at SmallBizU to help us develop ProForma Income Statements, Balance Sheets Etc. We were dreading how we were going to develop them in time to meet a deadline. SmallBizU literally came to the rescue and we were able to produce ProForma statements for our revenue model in just a few hours. Wow and thank you is all I can say."

—Jose Rodriguez, CEO, Medical Charting Solutions,

LLC

"SmallBizU will provide growth oriented companies in Indiana the key knowledge they will need to become successful, thus catapulting Indiana to a higher level of economic independence and success."

—Steve Beck, President & CEO, Indiana Venture

Center

"This is a tremendous resource for any entrepreneur who is growing a business. The content and presentation platform is state-of-the-art. It not only does a good job covering the theory, but it drills down to the worksheet and tactical level—a level that entrepreneurs require in solving their day-to-day problems."

—Donald Kuratko, Chair, Johnson Center for Entrepreneurship, Indiana University

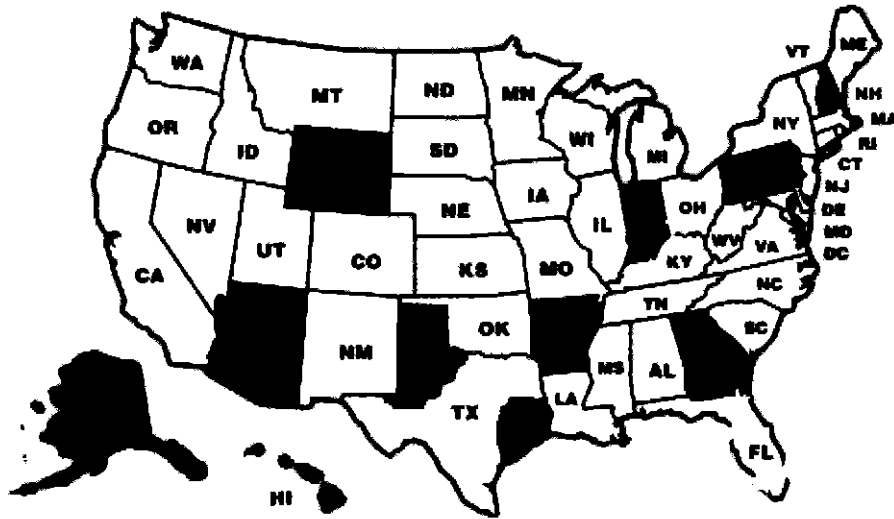
"SmallBizU provides one of the most comprehensive products I've ever seen in solving entrepreneurial problems. I wish this product

would have been available ten years ago. I encourage all entrepreneurs to use it, with the exception of my competitors, of course."

—Andrejs Kregers, CEO, 2MI

Group, Inc.

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