

SMALL BUSINESS

BRIEFINGS

Network aims to boost loans

The Small Business Banking Network, which began offering services today, said it aims to have 150 banking and microfinance institutions offering one million loans to small companies annually within the next five years. The group intends to boost the provision of \$10,000 to \$100,000 loans by providing technical assistance to small-business financiers in emerging economies, Urmi Sen Gupta, the director of the SBBN, said.

Bloomberg News

City demanded extra fees

For at least a decade, officials in Bell, Los Angeles County, arbitrarily required some businesses to make payments to the city totalling tens of thousands of dollars annually, in at least one case threatening a business owner with closure if he failed to comply. Bell's former city administrator, Robert Rizzo, and seven other current and former officials were charged by Los Angeles County prosecutors earlier this fall with multiple counts of corruption, mostly related to efforts to conceal their outsized salaries. All have pleaded not guilty. Rizzo was set to earn roughly \$1.5 million in compensation this year.

Los Angeles Times

► SURVIVAL TIP

Strategies for surviving tough times:

1. Stay curious. It's no time to shut down your own thinking.
 2. Get rid of the supply closet, or start managing inventory.
 3. Invite your savviest outsiders inside. At a minimum you'll build empathy and loyalty.
 4. Don't wait too long to cut costs.
 5. Allocate budget dollars toward existing customers. Loyal customers provide the highest marketing ROI.
- These tips were from a PowerHomeBiz.com compilation of strategies for small and home business at <http://bit.ly/BBucn>

► DIGITS

Four B.C. companies made it onto international human resources firm Aon Hewitt's 2011 list of the Best Small and Medium Employers in Canada.

► PROFILE

Little Haven Style & Gifting Company

Business Owner: Jodi Skulsky

Location: South Surrey

Phone Number: 604-916-7782

E-mail Address: info@littlehavenstyle.com

Web Address: www.littlehavenstyle.com

Opening Date: Sept. 2010

Description: Little Haven specializes in design and styling of children's spaces. Little Haven also creates gift boxes that are fresh and modern while environmentally friendly.



Forklift consultant Scott McLeod (standing), with three forklifts at I-XL Masonry Supplies in Surrey, helps clients manage their forklift fleets.

IAN SMITH/PNG

SMALL BUSINESS | Forklift consultant finds his niche despite downturn

'There is nobody in B.C. or Canada doing what I do,' Surrey entrepreneur says

BY JENNY LEE
VANCOUVER SUN

Scott McLeod was 45, a single dad with a young child, and a senior manager at a forklift company undergoing change — it was time to take stock.

Should he go out on his own as a consultant, or work for another forklift company?

"I had to think about what was going to be in my best long-term interest at my age, and where the best return for my family would be," he said.

McLeod had more than 20 years of dealership experience ending as a vice-president of sales and marketing, but he'd never had his own business. On the other hand, he had full-time responsibility for his young daughter and he really wanted to participate fully in her life.

McLeod decided to go it alone.

Explaining what he did to potential clients was the first challenge. "I quickly realized nobody is looking for a forklift consultant because they don't know what a forklift consultant is," McLeod said, laughing in retrospect. "As far as I'm aware, there is nobody in B.C. or Canada doing what I do."

He soon learned to position himself with as much face time as possible with clients.

And of course, life being the way it is, Surrey-based McLeod started Fleetman Consulting in

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SCOTT McLEOD
FLEETMAN CONSULTING

the spring of 2008, just months before the market crashed.

"A lot of businesses went into lockdown with respect to capital expenditures," he said. "I used to make 10 calls a day when employed. I had to make 20 calls."

Setting up his business systems took a year instead of the anticipated six months because McLeod forced himself to study search engine optimization. "I have sweated over figuring this stuff out," he said with the air of a man who's paid his dues. And, despite being in a traditional industry, he decided to invest time into social media.

"I already had a handle on the management side. The greater stretch for me is getting the word out to clients that I exist so they can find me, because once they find me, they immediately recognize the value."

Now with two years under his belt, is McLeod actually getting clients from Twitter and Facebook?

"It's minimal," he admitted. In an industrial environment, nothing replaces face-to-face contact, he said. "For the most part, my clients are not Facebook or Twitter types. I think it's more for the teenagers and single people etc. but I don't know whether that's true entirely. Partly because I don't know, I'm wanting to have a presence there so I don't leave that rock unturned."

McLeod's business concept is simple.

Thousands of forklift trucks are sold in B.C. each year at \$30,000 or more each and 90 per cent of sales are in the Lower Mainland. The trucks are found everywhere from a one-man machine shop making metal components to a large warehouse, distribution centre or stevedoring facility.

"Pretty much everybody uses forklifts except financial institutions, restaurants, retail and anything administrative based," McLeod said.

Most companies go to the dozen or so dealers in B.C. and simply buy the same equipment they've always bought.

If you ask "how many trucks you got, and how many hours per year do you put on the equipment, how well utilized is your fleet, and how much is your fleet costing you per operating hour, most clients won't be able to answer those questions," McLeod said, "because the management of the forklift fleet is generally not a top priority compared to managing the inventory they have in the warehouse," McLeod said.

McLeod charges a simple fee for service to help clients maximize return on forklift assets. A locally based, one-location company such as a wholesale lumber yard or food processor with fewer than five forklift trucks, might pay a few hundred dollars for an analysis.

Many companies have too many trucks, McLeod said. "I've seen clients that have twice

as many as they need because that's the way it's always been done."

Forklifts often sit idle. "There's a production line and every 20 minutes, something needs to be picked up and put away in a warehouse," he said. "Once that job is done, the operator has to wait for the next 20 minutes. That's a wasted asset."

Distributing production line work among several forklift operators can allow greater efficiency.

Others companies are still running propane forklifts without realizing electric forklifts have advanced and no longer need long downtimes for battery charging. McLeod figures a 5,000-pound capacity propane forklift operating six hours a day, five days a week uses \$26,000 in fuel alone over five years.

"I'm so glad that I made the decision [to go out on my own]," McLeod said. "I have complete control over my destiny. I can fully support my daughter when she needs to be supported as far as attending school events and activities, but at the same time, I'm able to completely look after my clients because I can work however many hours I need to in order to get the job done."

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