

Christopher Bakken – Start Handmade

Background:

When I was younger, I dreamed about owning my own business! Finally, when I was twelve years old, my dreams became a reality. I began making little string art pieces to hang around my room for my own enjoyment. One day, my sister wanted a beautiful string art piece that would remind her of home while she was away at college. After a bit of brainstorming and experimenting, I decided to make her a Geneva Lake outline string art! Her reaction to the end result was more than I ever expected. After that, I thought to myself, "If she loved this so much, why wouldn't someone else who lives around here love it too?" From there, I started experimenting with new designs and selling Geneva Lake string art to my friends and family. Word of mouth was a major key in my expansion at the beginning.

Overview:

Start Handmade is a home decor company that specializes in local string art. My goal for Start Handmade is to make an impact on the community that inspired us in the first place. My best selling product is the Geneva Lake string art that is 12" by 28" for \$100. I have a few different stain and string options that allow the customer to personalize it however they would like! Although the Geneva Lake product is my best seller, I also do a lot of custom pieces. A customer comes to me with a design that they need, and I work with them to determine how I can make a piece as beautiful as possible. I have one employee that manages all of the marketing on social media. We use Facebook to target our older market such as moms who own a house and live in the area. Facebook ads allow us to key in our specific target market. In addition, I have been experimenting with local magazine advertisements to expand our brand awareness.

Personal Qualities:

I get great satisfaction in coming up with a plan and then seeing it become a reality. This is why I feel so passionate about the success of Start Handmade. From the beginning of this business, I saw it as much more than simply a way to make money. I saw it as an opportunity to use my planning skills to take an idea into a full grown business. The Geneva Lake area is where I grew up, so to make an impact on the community is one of my main goals. Combining my satisfaction of executing a plan and making a difference on my community is what inspires me to keep Start Handmade moving forward. One of the difficulties of running Start Handmade is to stay motivated when I am not making any sales. Rather than getting discouraged and giving up on the business, I've decided to be proactive by hiring someone with social media advertising skills to increase traffic, updating/innovating the Start Handmade website, and planning for future expansion. Though I am risking the money and time invested, I am confident that it will lead to greater sales and expansion of the business. One recent success is the achievement of Start Handmade's single month sales volume in company history. This was achieved in December of 2018 by using focused and strategic marketing in the months leading up to the holiday season.

The Future:

Start Handmade has major expansion plans between now and the summer of 2019. The first step for the future is to open an Etsy shop to be able to sell my pieces completely online. After we have a stable etsy shop, I plan to introduce DIY (Do it Yourself) kits into the etsy shop. This way, customers can pick a design that they like, nail the piece using a supplied template, and string the piece themselves! Once I create a DIY kit that is working well, I will plan a workshop where customers can sign up online, and come in with friends to create a string art piece. From there, advertising will be key in the expansion of Start Handmade and that is where my employee will make a large impact. Once I figure out a model that works in the Geneva Lake area, I can expand to other areas that have an iconic image as well.