

Planning for Rapid Growth Keeps Company Busy in Downturn

Chris Brewer's business, Brewer Technology Solutions, Inc., was nearly a runaway success. From October 2003, when his low-voltage electrical company began wiring security and communications systems for industrial, commercial and residential clients in Brunswick, through 2007, his revenues grew an average of 30 to 35 percent a year and his employees from 2 to 13. "We were growing like a skyrocket," he says.



Chris Brewer and Debbie Graham

Yet when most business owners would be popping the cork off a champagne bottle to celebrate, Brewer picked up the phone and called his SBDC consultant, Debbie Graham, to share a concern. "I feel fairly confident that I would have grown myself out of business, been a victim of my own success, if I had not turned to the SBDC at this point," says Brewer. "Anyone who's been in business for themselves will know what I'm talking about. The idea that a little bit is good and a lot is better is not necessarily true – there has to be structure to the growth. There has to be a firm plan."

Brewer's relationship with the SBDC began when he decided to launch his business after nine years in the trade. "One of the first things we did was contact Debbie," he says. "I know systems and installation, but business was my weak side."

Graham showed Brewer how to set up his payroll and finalize his corporate structure. She helped him write job descriptions and his employee handbook. Brewer took advantage of the SBDC's QuickBooks course. "Chris started off small and didn't go beyond what he could handle," she says. "He knew that there was a lot of potential out there for low-voltage electrical contracting and built a rapidly growing company on his strong reputation and good marketing. I spotted the 'Team BTS' trucks everywhere."

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When Brewer called Graham about his company's growing pains, she told him about FastTrac®. He signed up for the fall program.

"Chris wanted to expand; to grow his company to the next level. His timing was perfect to attend FastTrac®. He was serious about maximizing his potential," she says.

She reports that Brewer's participation is paying off. "They got a significant government contract that's helping the company weather the downturn with residential work. Plus, they have diversified into maintenance projects and are servicing systems that need to be routinely checked and monitored." Graham and Brewer continue to discuss his company's strategic planning once a month.

"The turning point in our business longevity was taking advantage of the SBDC's FastTrac® course," says Brewer. "It showed me how to analyze our strengths and weaknesses and evaluate economic trends a lot better, helping me to prepare for today's challenges. Lessons learned have allowed me to foresee some of the problems coming and adjust our business model and marketing to try to ride out the storm."

"In 2008 our growth was .4 percent, but considering the economy and building industry, I consider it to be a good year," he says.