

Business Ownership is an Adventure

Small-business owner Elizabeth Howard transitions from online-only to a brick and mortar business.

By: Kellsey Miller

Elizabeth Howard, Virginia Tech, started The Cordial Cricket as an online-only custom stationery business out of her home in 2005, while still working full time as a commercial banker for small businesses. She later realized there was no local store filling the demand for custom stationery, invitations and unique gifts and made the decision to open a retail store in May 2007 in Chester, Va.

One of the hardest aspects of transitioning from online-only to a brick and mortar location was finding a location that best served the business and gave it the most exposure. "When you're online, the world is virtually your location, but once you are in a retail brick and mortar location, the region of those you serve becomes more limited," Howard says. Other aspects and challenges of the transition included determining the right mix of products, the space needed to display the products in an appealing way, hiring employees for the first time, making sure they

were the right employees, creating staff schedules, ensuring proper signage and advertising and creating appealing visual merchandising displays.

"The amount of time that is required to start something all by yourself, all on your own is intense and not for the faint of heart, however, when you are working that hard for yourself and not for someone else, it seems a lot less like work and more like your own personal mission," says Howard. She also says starting a business has many unknowns. No matter how good your business plan is, no matter how hard you work, no matter how great your location, product, marketing or employees are, there is no crystal ball that tells you if it will all fall into place and be successful.

"I like to think of business ownership as an adventure rather than a job," she says. "Sometimes in an adventure you don't quite know where you will end up or how exactly you will complete the tasks before you or reach your next goal. There are many ups and downs along the way. I have found that keeping an adventure mindset maintains positivity and determination."

Her favorite aspect of The Cordial Cricket is the relationships that she has built with her customers, staff, vendors and colleagues. These relationships have helped her business be successful and continue to grow. "Hearing what our customers and colleagues have to say about how what we do has impacted them is the most rewarding return ever," says Howard.

For Howard, the biggest accomplishment has been completing five successful years of business.

She also writes for various local



Elizabeth Howard, Virginia Tech, is owner of The Cordial Cricket, an invitation, stationery and gift business in Chester, Va.

and industry publications, presents etiquette sessions and serves as an etiquette consultant. Recently, Howard published *The Cordial Cricket*, a children's book about manners. Her son, Will, illustrated the cover.

Brother Howard often thinks about the impact of her membership in Delta Sigma Pi. "Whether it be networking at an event, speaking to a group, putting together a newsletter, conducting a meeting, sitting on the board of an organization, planning an event or delegating tasks, each of these things I can trace directly back to something that I did or helped to do at Virginia Tech," she says. "I know that I am a more confident person, a better speaker and networker, and a more natural leader from practicing these things."

She recommends brothers use their experience in their chapters to the fullest capacity. Take an office,

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GIN Systems

Chapter Communication Tool Announced



Howard and her son, Will Nix, published a children's book about manners.

work on a committee or volunteer to do different projects, but don't just sit back and watch everyone else do all of the work. Jump in, get things done, make friends with your fellow brothers and be there when they need you. Reach out to alumni and ask them for help, advice and encouragement for your chapter. ▲

Tips for Small Business Advertising

My budget for advertising has always been fairly limited, but I am determined not to let that prevent my business from growing. I faithfully use technology and social media related marketing tools to promote my business, most of which are completely free, and have seen great success from them. My best advice for using social media as a form of marketing would be to make a commitment to it. Don't just create a profile, post a couple of things and sit back and say you'll get back to it when you have more time. Nothing will result. Make a commitment to it just as if it were a very expensive advertising campaign. Anything you commit to, will bring you results.

A screenshot of the Delta Sigma Pi GIN System web interface. The page features a header with the Delta Sigma Pi logo and the text 'America's Foremost Professional Fraternity for Men and Women Pursuing Careers in Business'. Below the header, there are several sections: 'MY MENU', 'LINKS/RESOURCES', 'NEWS', 'ANNOUNCEMENTS', 'EVENTS', 'FILES', 'QUESTIONS', and 'BIRTHDAYS'. The 'ANNOUNCEMENTS' section lists items like 'T-Shirt Signups!', 'Living In The House', and 'Order of Omega Banquet Awards'. The 'EVENTS' section shows a calendar with dates and times for various events. The 'FILES' section lists documents such as 'Formal_Bus_List.doc' and 'order_of_omega_application.doc'. The 'QUESTIONS' section has a list of questions and answers. The 'BIRTHDAYS' section lists members and their birth dates. On the right side, there is a 'GIN SYSTEM WALL' section with a 'what's this?' link and a list of recent posts, including 'Upcoming Event', 'New Announcement Posted', and 'New File Posted'.

Delta Sigma Pi has partnered with GIN (Group Interactive Networks) to provide each collegiate chapter with the added benefit of a free online chapter communication system. The GIN Systems include web-based organizational tools and a customized Facebook tab that can be added to the chapter's Facebook fan page. Each chapter will have its own secure, members-only "GIN System," that includes e-mail and text messaging groups, private file sharing, announcements, surveys, voting and iPhone/iPad applications that allow for instant communication through Facebook and mobile devices.

This system brings all the chapter communications online. Everything officers need to manage the chapter and connect with members can be found in one central place, and is accessible at all times. GIN offers online calendars with automatic text and email reminders, points tracking, mass text messaging and discussion boards. Even more, the system is private to the chapter—each member has his or her own user name and password, and only members (collegiate, pledges, alumni, national leadership) added by the chapter can access the system. Each chapter participated in online training in February, so all systems should now be active.

In addition, the Central Office Communication System allows the national Fraternity to share files, announcements and calendar events directly with chapters. For more information, visit www.dspgin.com.