



Melbert Design Group Inc.

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For more information or to sign up
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SUCCESS STORY #206:

PRINTING ENTREPRENEUR HAS DESIGNS ON SUCCESS

Small Business Development Center hosted by El Camino College

Melbert Design Group Inc. • Los Angeles, CA

BEFORE:

Melbert Design Group Inc. provides sublimation designs to the apparel manufacturing industry in the form of “transfer paper.” Sublimation printing delivers higher margins by allowing high-quality designs to be transferred onto low-cost garments, giving them a higher perceived value. Melanie Torbert had helped launch the largest sublimation company in the world, Simso Tex, as well as the second-largest, Avid Ink. While launching a division for another company, she realized she didn’t want to be an employee—she wanted her own business.

BEST ADVICE:

Torbert first consulted with El Camino College SBDC Business Advisor Sharon Peterson in 2005 about plans to start a business printing designs on microfiber cloths used for cleaning eyeglasses and computer screens. Peterson suggested she re-focus on the garment industry, where her expertise lay. After taking a few years to lay the groundwork, Torbert launched Melbert Design Group in September 2007. In addition to fine-tuning her concept, Peterson helped Torbert develop a business plan and, in November 2008, obtain an SBA-guaranteed Community Express Loan for \$12,500 for inventory and cash flow.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- **Keep overhead low.** Peterson advised Torbert not to do too much too fast. “She [helped me make decisions] about machinery and equipment, what I should start off with and what I can grow into,” says Torbert.
- **Different lenders have different requirements.** “I had put a business plan together before, but I had to redo my plan for this particular lender—they all have different guidelines,” Torbert explains. “Sharon assisted me with information and content, reviewed everything, and was really specific about the numbers.”
- **Find a mentor.** “There are a lot of friends and family who believe in you, but only to a point,” Torbert says. “As much as they want to support you, they get tapped out. I think of Sharon as a partner. She’s listened, she’s given me great advice—and she’s really held my feet to the fire.”

AFTER:

Thanks to SBDC assistance, Melbert Design Group’s sales grew by \$118,000 between January 2009 and September 2009. “We anticipate sales close to \$500,000 by the end of the year,” says Torbert. Future plans include launching a new product line (the microfiber cloths Torbert originally discussed with Peterson) and creating a private-label apparel collection for sale direct to retailers.

With Peterson’s help, Torbert recently applied for a \$25,000 unsecured loan, which she expects to obtain soon. She will use the funds to hire additional employees and free up more of her time to focus on sales. Through it all, she’ll keep working with Peterson. “That infusion of capital helped keep my doors open,” she says. “If it weren’t for the SBDC, I wouldn’t be where I am right now.”