



SUCCESS STORY #710: **RESTAURATEUR SERVES UP SUCCESS**

**Small Business Development Center
hosted by Ventura College**

Zzyzx Café • Camarillo, CA

Zzyzx Café

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BEFORE:

After attending culinary school and working extensively in the restaurant industry, Brian Fry came to the Ventura College SBDC with a dream to open a “modern breakfast and lunch restaurant” serving hip, healthy, innovative food. Knowing the importance of a “road map,” Fry had already developed a business plan and was looking at locations when a regional Small Business Administration office referred him to the Ventura SBDC in November 2008.

BEST ADVICE:

“I met with Brian initially to review his business plan and discuss the criteria he needed to meet to get a business loan,” says SBDC marketing consultant Rose Obetz. “I recommended local banks to him, and he is now banking with one of them. We developed a marketing plan and a [grand] opening marketing strategy.”

LESSONS LEARNED:

- **Use social media.** “I’m part of the generation that’s pretty comfortable with on-line tools,” says Fry, 35. “Rose suggested all of those—a Facebook page, a Yelp page, a Web site—and was able to give me names of people that could work with me on these.”
- **Think local.** Because the best potential customers for a breakfast and lunch restaurant are people who live within 5 miles of the location, Obetz recommended that Fry join the local chamber of commerce and network in the community. “Joining the Chamber has been very positive—we help each other get customers,” says Fry. Networking has helped generate more marketing opportunities: “I got asked to judge a chili contest, where I was able to tell people about the restaurant,” says Fry. “That’s a free marketing tool.” And an article about Zzyzx Café in the local *Camarillo Acorn* newspaper increased business by 200 percent.
- **Be prepared when seeking financing.** Fry didn’t get a startup loan—“I picked a bad time to look for money,” he says—but the SBDC referred him to plenty of possible sources, who were positive about his business. “A lot of them said I should come back in a year,” he says. “I think once I have six months’ worth of numbers to show this can work, getting a loan won’t be an issue.”

AFTER:

Six weeks after opening in August 2009, the 40-seat restaurant has received positive write-ups in local papers and is already generating sales of \$8,000 per week. Fry’s long-term goals include expanding into Orange County, California, and Las Vegas.

Fry says the SBDC was a great help, and plans to meet with them regularly to update his marketing plan. “He is also going to meet with our SBDC loan consultant, Ron Minnihan, who will try to help him find a working capital loan,” says Obetz.

“To start your own business, you’ve got to be prepared to sweat and you’ve got to really want it,” says Fry. “The SBDC understands that, because [their consultants] are people who did it themselves.”