



How One Entrepreneur is Building a Business around Fitness and Plant-based Nutrition

With support from Mid-Continent Public Library, a Kansas City businesswoman is helping companies develop wellness initiatives, and teaching people to enjoy plant-based diets

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Kansas City, MO – Kansas City resident Cindy Newland is one of several entrepreneurs using Mid-Continent Public Library's (MCPL) Square One Small Business Services to grow their small businesses.

Newland started Functional Fitness, a business focused on fitness and wellness, that targets local for-profit organizations. Prior to the pandemic, she went into corporate offices and taught wellness practices like yoga to employees. Newland has used MCPL's services, while developing her business over the past five years. Most of the library programs that she has participated in have focused on cultivating the online aspects of her business, such as advertising and social media.

MCPL's Square One Small Business Services program offers a comprehensive suite of online resources that are intended to help entrepreneurs learn basic skills that they need. This includes tools to help them build a cohesive business plan as well as tutorials to create reports and perform analyses. Also available are videos that teach people how to start specific kinds of ventures such as an event planning business, an Etsy shop, or a daycare. The library also provides access to online versions of various business and technology publications. In addition, the library offers mentoring to help guide small business owners.

Support from the library helped Newland accomplish several goals related to building her business. For example, she received guidance from library staff on how to effectively use Facebook ads – an important part of ensuring profitability. Newland also highlighted some of the individualized support she has received from Square One business mentors such as help with using Microsoft PowerPoint and information about branding. She also said that even if the Square One staff are unable to help, they work with her to find solutions. These services are a boon for small business owners like Newland who may not have the resources to hire consultants. “The library will always answer questions that I have... and so far, I think they've answered all of them.”

Many small businesses lost customers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and some have been forced to close their doors at least temporarily. During the pandemic, Newland estimates she lost 75% of her business. The remaining 25% of her business comes from corporate clients who have continued to do fitness classes online. But losing customers has not slowed Newland down. Since the pandemic, she has expanded her business to include a new blog called Intentionally Eat which will provide recipes and related products that help people interested in a plant-based diet. One of her core products is a 21-day weight loss program.

Eventually, Newland hopes to go back to teaching fitness classes in person with safeguards in place. However, her focus has shifted to sustaining that business rather than growing it. Her primary goal now is growing her plant-based blog. She is currently working on creating content for the website and on increasing product sales. Long term, she hopes that Intentionally Eat becomes her main income source. And that it is a valuable resource for people who are interested in learning more about plant-based foods.

Newland expects to continue working with Square One staff as she builds her business. Moving forward, she said she would love to see more classes offered by the library. For example, she would be interested in a class focused on e-commerce to support businesses like hers that sell products online or one focused on creating webinars. She also hopes that the library can offer more ongoing opportunities for personalized support.

Based on her positive experiences with MCPL, Newland encourages other up and coming entrepreneurs to contact the library for support and guidance. She sees Square One as part of a complementary suite of resources that are available to entrepreneurs in the Kansas City area.

Her advice to others who are interested in entrepreneurship is to remember that building a business is hard work, and that failure is an important part of learning. Equally important is knowing when and how to change direction if a particular business idea is not working or if circumstances change suddenly as happened during COVID-19. For those who live in her area, she recommends proactively engaging with MCPL staff and the Square One program to learn more about available events and classes and take advantage of opportunities for one-on-one support. "I tell everybody that owns a business to absolutely get in touch and get some help," she said.

