

# Bennett Law Center



## MEET BRIDGETTE BENNETT

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For the first three years, practicing law meant a full plate for attorney Bridgette M. Bennett of the Bennett Law Center. Between launching her immigration practice and representing more and more clients, she didn't have time for much else. She had a nagging feeling, however, that she could be doing more to strengthen the foundation of her firm and manage its growth more effectively. It was then that Bridgette turned to the Florida SBDC at UCF's office in Lake County. She'd heard FSBDC offered seminars that could help her answer her many business questions. And she found she had the opportunity to have a no-cost, expert business consultant from the FSBDC dedicating their knowledge and experience to guiding her and her business. Without a business background of her own, the FSBDC represented an opportunity to get, as she says, "real information and real life experience in a highly digestible way."

And so it began in April, 2014. Bridgette attended the FSBDC's New Venture seminar series and took classes in marketing, finance, business plan writing and more. She connected with Stan Austin, an FSBDC consultant and the Area Manager for Lake County. Together, they began an evaluation of Bennett Law Center's current situation and the goals Bridgette had for it. She quickly came to understand "You don't know what you don't know," as they say. She found no question or idea was too big or too small for the FSBDC, whether it be about human resources issues or finalizing her business plan. She enjoyed the benefits of consulting tailored to her situation which helped get her plans in focus and her actions better targeted at her long term goals.

In the short term, up first was Bridgette's desire to refinance her mortgage on the building that housed her firm and move from a private mortgage to a commercial financing, as well as having the ability to use some of the loan proceeds to increase her working capital. However, she was afraid her credit score and the value of the property might keep her from obtaining a loan.

After Bridgette put together an initial loan application package for presentation to the lenders, she brought it to the FSBDC for review. There Stan Austin provided suggestions and answered her questions, enabling Bridgette to complete the loan application and present it to the lender. After the usual back and forth with them, with Stan at her side throughout, her application was approved and Bridgette received her \$250,000 SBA-guaranteed loan, with a healthy piece for working capital.

"I'm very grateful for the assistance of the FSBDC," Bridgette commented. "They were an invaluable resource in helping me get my business into a much stronger position. For all of you business owners out there, I say 'Just do it; it's a no brainer,'" Bridgette went on. "The Florida SBDC at UCF will take you through the process, help you meet your business challenges and become your accountability partner for achieving success."

## Providing the tools, strategies, and expertise to help Florida's business community thrive.

*State Designated as Florida's Principal Provider of Business Assistance [288.001, Fla. Stat.]*

The Florida SBDC at UCF is a member of the Florida SBDC Network, a statewide service network funded in part through cooperative agreements with the U.S. SBA, Defense Logistics Agency, State of Florida, and other private and public partners; hosted by the University of West Florida; and nationally accredited by the Association of SBDCs.

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