

## Ingenious Culinary Concepts

Hitting a bump in the road goes with the territory when you are a small business owner. The challenge for an entrepreneur is to know what to do when you hit that bump. When Kern Halls, founder and chief innovator of Ingenious Culinary Concepts, encountered a slowdown in the growth of his company, he decided his best bet was to seek assistance from the Florida SBDC at the University of Central Florida (FSBDC at UCF).

Ingenious Culinary Concepts (ICC) core business is helping Kindergarten through grade 12 school food service programs be successful, both in terms of satisfying their student customers and minimizing, if not eliminating, expenses for their school system. Saving children from hunger translates to them doing better academically. And, because school lunch programs rely heavily on federal funding, if they are underutilized and don't make the most of the available federal dollars, then the excess costs fall on the local school district.

Enter Kern Halls and Ingenious Culinary Concepts. Using extensive food service experience and expertise, the company brings a process-oriented approach to building a marketing strategy focused on atmosphere, operations, menu and food quality. The goal is single minded: to persuade students to eat in the cafeteria. It's why their tag line is "We Bring your Customers to the Table."

As with many small businesses however, ICC's growth had plateaued. "We hit a little bump in revenues so I went to the FSBDC," Halls recalls. "I'd heard they had great consultants and great knowledge that could help companies like mine get over hurdles like I was facing. And, Boy, was I right."

Halls took advantage of the FSBDC's no-cost, expert business consulting; seminars and workshops; and market research resources. Working with FSBDC consultant Jairo Batista, who provided a website analysis and social media recommendations, Halls redesigned his marketing strategy and increased its effectiveness. Thanks to Batista, he also consulted with Steve South, Manager of the Florida Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) at the University of Central Florida, who assisted him with pursuing government business certifications as well as identifying government contracting opportunities.

"Jairo and the FSBDC really have a command of marketing, with a real depth of understanding," says Halls. "He made sure we got everything we needed to achieve growth for our company. And Steve opened our eyes to what's out there. He showed us the systems available to us for finding government contracts, and he guided us through the certification process. Both have helped us win big contracts."

"Since starting with the FSBDC, our revenues have doubled over last year," Halls continued. "We wanted to spread our wings and diversify our revenues, and we have. We've grown fast and now are so busy we are hiring. Going forward, we're looking for the FSBDC help us with a strategy to manage that growth, while staying lean but still adding clients and revenues."

Kern Halls hit a bump in the road but he knew what to do; he got help in the form of assistance from the Florida SBDC and Florida PTAC at the University of Central Florida.

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The Florida SBDC at UCF is a member of the Florida SBDC Network, a statewide partnership program nationally accredited by the Association of America's SBDCs and funded in part by the U.S. Small Business Administration, Defense Logistics Agency, State of Florida, and other private and public partners, with the University of West Florida serving as the network's lead host institution. Florida SBDC services are extended to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis. Language assistance services are available for limited English proficient individuals.

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### KERN HALLS

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