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On Small Business with Ralph Coker

Web entrepreneurs find recipe for success

December 6, 2005

Q: I've heard that the Internet is a great way to start a business. What do I need to know to start a successful Internet business?

A: Your question probably can be answered best with an example of a successful Internet business. CDKitchen is a cooking and recipe Web site business started by Valerie Whitmore in 1995, in the earlier days of Internet marketing. Valerie was a self-taught computer programmer but had no previous business experience or Web site design experience. She became interested in Web site design and her love for cooking led to the concept for the business. Her husband, Brent, was a professor of media studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi until leaving academia to help her with the growing business.

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The business receives free recipes on the Web site from cooking enthusiasts, which are screened and formatted to make them more appealing to Web site viewers, and then posted on the site. Recipes on the site are free to viewers. The business generates its revenue from paid advertising. The business grew steadily but not dramatically until three years ago when Valerie and Brent left their day jobs to spend full time in the business. They also added a staff employee whose primary duty is to screen and format recipes. They also added three part-time food professionals on a contract basis who write as featured columnists for the site.

In the past three years the business has grown rapidly. It receives 3,000 free recipes each day from contributors and 6 million to 8 million page views per month. Advertising rates are based on page views. They have a contract with a single ad agency that sells all advertising space. Their advertisers include a number of large national consumer products and service companies. About 80 percent of the Web site viewers are women and ads are targeted to products and services that appeal

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to women.

Web site traffic depends primarily on search engines such as Google and the site is designed and optimized to be found easily. Another key to marketing success is to be responsive to feedback and provide the content viewers want. The primary business expenses are for staff and the time spent by the business owners to provide quality Web site content. Initial capital required was small, which made it an ideal start-up business. The business is also a home business, which minimizes overhead fixed cost.

The business operates in a niche between a few larger recipe Web sites with large staffs and corresponding large costs and many small, one-person Web sites that have limited content. The business is able to provide quality content that competes well with the large Web sites but at reasonable costs. The owners are cautiously optimistic about the business's future but realize that Internet and search engine technology is changing rapidly and the result can potentially help or harm the business.

The Web site can be viewed at domain name HYPERLINK <http://www.cdktichen.com> www.cdktichen.com. You also will need to resolve similar issues of business concept, marketing strategy, cost, Web site design, quality and competitive advantage for your new business.

Ralph Coker, a retired refinery manager, volunteers with the local chapter of SCORE, counselors to small business. Contact SCORE at 879-0017, ext. 22, or HYPERLINK <mailto:score221@sbcglobal.net> score221@sbcglobal.net. Also visit HYPERLINK [http://www.score-](http://www.score-corpus-christi.org)

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