

CASE STUDY

VIN DE GARDE CELLAR SYSTEMS INC.
SEPTEMBER 2009

Vin de Garde Cellar Systems Inc. is a small wine cellar business, based in Vancouver. Vin de Garde designs and manufactures custom and modular wine storage products. They currently deliver these products across North America, with the majority of their business in the lower mainland of BC.

The recent economic downturn resulted in decreased sales in November and December 2008 for Vin de Garde. In response, owner Billy Carpenter attended a Business Innovation Partnership (BIP) seminar on “Recession Proof Marketing” in hopes of getting some tips in the area of sales and marketing. Billy felt that his business could benefit from more personalized coaching from Neil Godin, marketing expert and the host of this seminar. He has engaged BIP in a project that will involve a series of six workshops, given by Neil Godin, at their facility. The project goals are to increase sales, by planning, building and implementing a marketing strategy.

Project Highlights

The project began with Vin de Garde’s identifying their core business, how they’ve been marketing and where they see their trouble spots in getting their message out.

The approach is to identify a single goal for each workshop. In this way, they attempt to tackle each problem one at a time. They start by brainstorming together as a group, identifying possible solutions and finally choosing the best approach by the end of each session.

The first issue they tackled was identifying how to improve sales immediately. They approached this by implementing what Neil Godin describes as “attraction marketing” or activities that draw customers to you. Godin suggested that Billy organize a wine and cheese reception at his showroom. In this way Vin de Garde would leverage some of its existing assets. One, offering both their wine cellar showroom and a professional wine tasting room (the only business of this kind in Canada), and the other sharing Billy’s knowledge as a fully trained sommelier. In addition it allowed Billy to do ‘warm calling’ rather than cold calling. He went to high-end residential building sites to meet and invite builders, architects, interior designers, etc. to his events. With “warm calling” you are not “selling”, just making suggestions; giving out information, and building your data base while finding out how to contact people you wish to present invitations to. This is a much easier and more pleasant task than the usual selling approach, according to Billy Carpenter.



Vin de Garde also participates in the BIP sponsored “Lunch and learn” program which provides learning sessions for Architects and Interior Designers at their business locations. In these sessions BC Wood introduces products specific to the program and provides Architects with learning units to maintain their accreditation with AIBC.

In addition, Vin de Garde is a Registered Provider with AIBC. Billy offers to coach Architects and Interior Designers on “How To Specify” a technically sound wine cellar. By doing this, Vin de Garde is positioning itself as the experts in this highly specialized niche market.



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Neil Godin has encouraged Billy to build business contacts and relationships with other suppliers who provide niche products and services to the same high-end market segment. He has since formed a “leads” group which meets monthly in order to share share contacts and market intelligence, and plan introductions to each others’ clients, as appropriate.

The latest work has been on improving the “brand” and “message” through simplifying the information on the existing website and in new print collateral and providing an educational approach to identifying products in their showroom. The objective is to provide a clear, branded and informative message to their prospective clients. These improvements remain under construction.



The Results

While they are only about half way through the proposed improvements, Billy says there have been immediate and definite improvements. “When we do what he (Neil Godin) suggest, it works” Billy explains. The wine and cheese events have had an immediate impact; with over \$100,000.00 in sales after hosting two events. The construction site visits have brought in so much work that he has not had to go beyond the West Vancouver area as yet.

When the project began, Billy Carpenter was working alone in his business and now he has three employees. He has hired a full time industrial designer, (who also assists with design and marketing support), and 2 millworkers to build his wood products. This growth has occurred at the bottom of a deep recession.

Billy’s marketing group, “Vancouver Building Blocks” continues to meet each month. It has grown to seven members and recruits new members through a peer review process; all are required to offer a niche product and must be recognized as leaders in their market. This group meets once a month to share contacts and market information.

Overall, Vin de Garde feels it’s company and brand continues to be strengthened because of the work they are doing with Neil Godin. They note that having an objective third party and leveraging Godin’s experience in sales and marketing has given them confidence in making positive changes with reduced risk. Neil Godin’s task-based approach also kept the project on track and moving forward.

For more information please contact:

Scott Thompson
604 882 7100
sthompson@bcwood.com