

CASE STUDY

Working Wood Program December, 2009

'Working Wood' 2009, was a pilot program aimed at fostering the development of emerging furniture designer/manufacturers in BC. Selected companies were given business assistance by way of educational sessions and mentoring. The duration of the program was one year and it culminated with all participating companies attending a tradeshow in Vancouver called IDSWest.

Over the years, BC Wood has witnessed how a little business acumen at the crucial formative stages of business development can mean the difference between success or failure. This project is an effort to provide that assistance.

The Program

Jason Heard, Director of BC's design show IDSWest was brought in to coordinate this program. Jason's perspective was valuable because he sees first hand what it takes for small furniture companies to go to the next level. Jason began by producing a shortlist of designer/manufacturers that he felt would make good use of the program. This group was approached and five companies signed up. Those companies were Christian Woo Design + Build, Dexel Crafted, Kurve Studio Furniture, Park Studio Furniture and Zillion Design.

The first step was to tailor the program to the specific needs of the group. The group was brought together in an informal meet and greet and to discuss the content and direction for the program. Four distinct learning events were designed to provide tools for the management, growth, and marketing of their businesses.

The **first** session was about branding and event marketing. Smallbox Marketing's Shawn Bouchard was brought in to demystify branding, using social media and other strategies for building a successful brand. Jason Heard provided information on event marketing, specifically how to showcase their particular product in a tradeshow booth and how to gather contact information to make the most of a show.

The **second** session was a half day spent with successful designer/manufacturer Brent Comber. Brent provided companies with a guided tour of his shop and explained the trials and tribulations he went through to get his business where it is today. Brent described his solutions to issues like; sourcing wood, shop practices, marketing and everything in between.



Dexel Crafted



Zillion Design

The **third** session was about product development and was delivered by wood product design consultant Barbara Bell. These sessions were conducted individually in participants own shops. Discussion revolved around their individual design processes and product directions.

The **fourth** and final learning event was a session on business fundamentals with Anand Pandernath. The content of this session included business planning, client management, performance measures and subcontracting and hiring.

Each of the five participants in the Working Wood program were given a 10x10 booth at the 2009 IDSWest show. This is a trade show for the Interior Design Industry, a significant target market for these furniture designer/makers. Attending this show put all of their new skills into practice; product display and merchandising, pre-show marketing, making contacts and sales etc.

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The Results

The consensus from the five participants was that this program brought attention to business details that are critical but often misunderstood or overlooked. For some it was a good refresher course, for others it was the first time to consider these fundamentals.

Certainly a highlight for all was a chance to get to know Brent Comber, a mentor in their business niche. The participants were inspired and gleaned some very important real-world advice. The culminating IDSWest show was also reportedly an excellent experience and three out of five have already signed up for next year's show. The pre-show marketing really paid off for several of the participants. For Kurt Dexel of Dexel Crafted "it was the best show to date". Dexel also reported sales of \$10,000 as a result of participating in this program.

The branding and marketing session was particularly useful for Christian Woo of Christian Woo Design + Build as it inspired him to rethink his current image and during the year he rebuilt his website and brand. Ben Burnett of Zillion Design took Jason Heard's advice and created a more focused booth presentation than he had in previous shows and found the response much better. Buyers were able to immediately get a sense of what he is about and could ask specific questions about pricing and availability rather than wasting time on finding out what he does.

Both Derek Morton (Park Studio Furniture) and Enrico König (Kurve Studio Furniture) found the relationships they developed with each other during the course of this program valuable. Several colleagues have shared information and collaborated already.

Two other fortunate spin-offs from this program were the participation of two companies in the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York. This was invaluable for these two who not only learned a great deal but also got international exposure. The participants were also asked to do a group show at the Vancouver Museum where they had further experience and market exposure.



Christian Woo Design + Build



Park Studio Furniture



Kurve Studio Furniture

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