



Small Business Builder: Secrets of Success

Learn to Succeed ... from a Real-Life Story and Free E-learning Sites

By [Mary Campbell](#)

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Some business owners need a push to get started.

That's what happened to Patti Danos, a Chicago-based business-book publicist who specializes in workplace titles and has boosted sales for dozens of authors, including Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans (*Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay*), John Drake (*Downshifting: How to Work Less and Enjoy Life More*) and Christopher Avery (*Teamwork Is an Individual Skill: Getting Your Work Done When Sharing Responsibility*).

Here's a sample of the business wisdom Danos has collected:

The single most important lesson she's learned as a business owner: "Knowing and understanding the power of 'no.' From saying 'no' to new business that doesn't feel right to saying 'no' to a client request that doesn't gel strategically to saying 'no' to timelines proposed by others that compromise my work-life balance, I've learned that there's as much power, if not more power, in 'no' than 'yes.'"

On overcoming inertia: "I got started seven years ago after I was 'nudged' to do so by a layoff, which turned out to be one of my life's greatest blessings."

On getting new business: "Referrals, referrals, referrals. I've built my business by word of mouth alone, thanks to doing excellent work with excellent clients."

On keys to success: "I believe it's important to visualize your 'ideal' client (or customer or account or whatever the case may be) and to do so as specifically as possible so that you can attract her, as well as identify her once you do."

Readers: Do you have business-success secrets you'd like to share? Please e-mail a brief description of your business and its successes to smallbiz@gravity.biz

Quick and Easy Learning

There's not much you can't learn about online, and the price is right if you choose from the array of courses available from the Small Business Association. In a little under an hour, I completed two free courses in the "SBA Classroom": "How to Raise Capital for a Small Business" and "Building Your Business with Web Marketing." There are no exams (though there are summary questions at the end of the financing course); in fact, the communication is all one-way.

The financing course (text-based) took about four minutes. If you like, you can print it out and read it during your mid-morning coffee break. You'll learn about:

The usual sources of start-up financing: personal savings, family and friends, banks and credit unions.

What to include in a loan proposal □ basically a mini-business plan. Information about SBA-guaranteed loans (such as the LowDoc program) and suggestions for finding additional information.

The Web-marketing course takes you to the Cisco Systems site. Offering both visual and audio instruction, it's a bit more polished than the financing course. It took about five minutes to register and ensure I had a new enough version of RealPlayer. (There's also a text-only version if you don't want to bother.)

The course itself took about 25 minutes □ something I'd have wanted to know ahead of time, though a progress bar indicates about how much time is left.

If you know absolutely nothing about &

Creating a customer-friendly site Exchanging links Promoting via banner ads and e-mail newsletters

& you'll probably find the course, and the referrals to other resources, quite useful. You might want to open a document for word-processing so you can take notes.

For more free online courses and tutorials, check out www.sba.gov/classroom/ or www.docnmail.com. Caution: If a course requires registration, you'll have to give an e-mail address. Just say "no" to e-mail offers to avoid being deluged with unwanted promotions. Consider opening a free Hotmail or Yahoo! mailbox to use on these occasions, reserving your "private" mailbox for friends and clients.

An editor since the age of 6, when she returned a love letter with corrections marked in red, Mary Campbell founded Zero Gravity in 1984 to provide writing, editing, marketing and other services to small businesses. Her presentations and workshops address small-business topics from Web sites to business writing. An editor of and contributor to dozens of publications (books, journals and newsletters), she is co-author □ with her sister, Pippi Campbell Peterson □ of the second edition of *Ready, Set, Organize! A Workbook for the Organizationally Challenged* (JIST Publishing, 2001). Please e-mail her your comments, questions and suggestions at smallbiz@zgravity.biz. *Small Business Builder* is published every other Wednesday.

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