

SIBL Makes Good Business Sense



François and Helen Bizalions operate a high-end, gourmet food business in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Bizalions' Fine Food specializes in European cheeses, charcuterie, chocolates, olive oils, pastas, soups, and spices. In addition to serving as a ready source of luxuries such as caviar, foie gras, and truffles for those special occasions, the shop boasts a café featuring grilled charcuterie, European style sandwiches, salads, and patisserie. And when the good weather beckons, the store provides picnic baskets of their most popular offerings. Their customers are a mixture of local residents, weekenders, and vacationers from the States and abroad.

In a telephone interview in February, François Bizalions spoke with Kristin McDonough and Betty Lacy about SIBL's role in helping the couple get their business up and running.

The Bizalions began their research about seven to eight months before opening their business, using a number of SIBL's print and electronic resources. Most useful were the EIC's subscription databases, and SIBL's broad collection of trade periodicals and food industry directories.

According to François, SIBL's online databases are extremely useful research tools. The information culled from these powerful e-resources provided the foundation for the couple's business plan. The Bizalions originally wanted to open a wine business in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, which is the geographic area on which they focused their initial search for demographic data [population, income, spending habits], market research [competitors, projected growth], and wine industry statistics.

Their results convinced the couple that start-up and day-to-day operational costs for a wine business in Brooklyn were too high. They decided instead to explore options outside New York City, and to change their planned wine business to a specialty food market.

François underscored that the statistics used to create their business plan played an important role in getting the

requisite financing. They discovered that bankers always focus on a plan's statistical and market data. Their business plan still serves as a blueprint for their day-to-day operations. François mused aloud that it was probably time to review it so that it reflects changes in their venture's day-to-day operations and objectives since its incorporation.

The databases are just one of the research tools the Bizalions used. In addition to taking some of SIBL's public training classes, François also attended an evening workshop on Starting Your Own Business. He praised SIBL as a business-to-business networking resource. According to François, the Library functioned as his office, "an urban oasis!" They came away with the knowledge that help is available – inside and outside the Library – to help realize a dream.

While the Bizalions live and work in the Berkshires, François says that even after the launch he would likely continue to use SIBL and its resources if the couple were still in New York.



He mentioned the perceived lack of robust business support in the Great Barrington area, where he has not yet been moved to join the local Chamber of Commerce. The fact that a SCORE office has just opened up in nearby Pittsfield is encouraging. And he and Helen use friends and her father as touchstones for ideas and for feedback.

The Bizalions bring an eclectic background to the specialty food business. François worked for 15 years in New York's fashion industry. He organized the spring and fall fashion shows for Nautica, traveled twice a year to textile markets in Europe, and was an editor at *GQ* magazine and for *The New York Times/Men's Fashion* section.

Helen worked for Polo Ralph Lauren and Nautica, and helped set up showrooms and display windows. They bring a strong visual sense to their business, a sense that's reflected in their store.

François has pertinent advice for entrepreneurs. Go after your dream, "Just do it!" Don't give up until you find a way to make your dream work. Take your time, be patient, and constantly re-think your concept. Trust your vision, your ideas, and your instincts. You CAN make it work!

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Open every day 9:00 am to 6:00 pm
www.bizalions.com

- - Betty Lacy