Written by Julie Desmond
Friday, 01 February 2013 12:52

For fun, education and breakfast, once a month a group of twenty or so hopeful souls meets to discuss their plans to start new businesses. The conversations are fascinating and I am alternately awed and perplexed by the amount of time and money people put into getting things started in Minnesota. Their exchanges cover ideas useful to anyone launching a new venture.

Know your customer. Byrant has been developing his food service product for over a year. He is almost ready to start selling, and asked the group if they know anyone who might be interested in buying. The group told Bryant what he knew but didn't want to hear: you have to talk to restaurant owners. Now. Before you spend another dime developing your product.

Being more of a concept guy than a sales guy, Bryant has put off that part of the process. His friends suggested a couple ways to motivate. They told him, Know who your customer is. Compile a list of restaurant owners in town. Next, know what your customer needs: arrange to talk with some of them to get their opinion on your idea. They might provide insight that will make a difference. Some might even want to make an investment. Let them know you're out there and interested in their input long before you have anything to sell them.

Know your focus. Bells. Whistles. More more more. This is what consumers expect from new products or services. Resist the temptation to please everyone, at least at first. Focus on one or two key aspects and get those right before adding more to your real or virtual menu. McDonald's started out selling milkshakes and burgers. The McRib came much later.

Software developer Doug described how this worked with his company. In the long term business plan, he knew he wanted to reach students and teachers with his product. He started out by launching the students' side of the program. When people started asking for a way for teachers to use it, he was ready.

Know how to think on your feet. When it matters, we humans find a way to make things work; people caught in the rain usually find a way to stay dry. Successful startup owner Matt tells the story of an opportunity he had to introduce his website to an influential group of people. Of course, the website crashed just hours before the meeting. Thinking on his feet, Matt made the presentation using a competitor's website, pointing out what was done well and ways in which

his website would be different. To some, this presentation seemed superior to the one he had planned because it illustrated Matt's knowledge about the industry and the competition, and let people know how his site stood out above the others. Don't give up because things do not go according to plan.

Plan, focus, adapt. Excellent guidelines for start-ups and long-time businesses alike.

Julie Desmond is IT Recruiting Manager with George Konik Associates, Inc. Send your resume, career plans and questions to jdesmond@georgekonik.com.